

# The Fellowship

by Isaac Errett

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*Isaac Errett's sermon emphasizes the biblical understanding of fellowship as a vital partnership among believers in the church, highlighting shared responsibilities and the need for selfless service.*

**Scripture:** Romans 15:26

**Topics:** "Church Fellowship", "Holy Spirit"

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## Description

Isaac Errett preaches about the significance of Acts 2 as the starting point for restoring New Testament Christianity, emphasizing the first sermon that announced complete redemption, the Holy Spirit's mission to convict sinners and comfort saints, and the establishment of the first church of Christ. He highlights the importance of fellowship, which has been a subject of doubt, and delves into the true meaning of fellowship as partnership, participation, and communion in aid. Errett stresses the need for believers to actively engage in the various ministries of the church, including financial contributions, to fully experience the blessings of fellowship with God and fellow believers.

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## Transcript

IT does not need to be argued here that the second chapter of Acts contains a record of the first sermon that announced a complete redemption; the first accomplishment of the promised mission of the Holy Spirit to convict sinners and comfort saints (John 16:7-14); the first authoritative announcement of Jesus as Lord and Christ; the first publication of the law of pardon under the reign of the new Lawgiver, and the planting of the first church of Christ. Its importance, therefore, as a starting-point in our labors to restore New Testament Christianity, can hardly be exaggerated. That we have succeeded in developing, from this chapter, the beginning of the reign of the Christ, the mode of the Spirit's operation in the conversion of sinners, the unchanging law of pardon and of initiation into the church of Christ, the infallible authority of the apostles to administer the affairs of the absent Lord, and the simple, spiritual worship of the primitive church, is also, we think, beyond question.

On one subject, however, there has been dimness--that of the fellowship. That the first church [425] adhered as steadfastly to the fellowship as to the teaching of the apostles, is positively affirmed; but precisely what is meant by fellowship, and how they continued in it, has been matter of so much doubt as to leave our churches largely destitute of the blessings of fellowship, and render them failures, so far as this feature of primitive Christianity is concerned.

We propose, therefore, an examination of this word, and of its application in Scripture, that we may ascertain if any definite conclusion can be reached as to its Scriptural import.

If it can be said to have any definite meaning among us, it is understood to signify the weekly contribution of money for benevolent purposes. Taking this as its strict import, there has been among us no other such instance of trifling with a divine ordinance; for the paltry contribution, week by week, of dimes and half-dimes by one-fourth or one-fifth of the members present at a church meeting, is a shameful slurring over of any just idea of fellowship in a solemn duty enjoined on all the saints. It is a custom, we take it, "more honored in the breach than in the observance;" for there is just enough done to lull the conscience of the selfish into quietness, and to belittle one's ideas of Christian benevolence, while, for all the great purposes of the true church life, it is so insignificant as to merit only contempt. It is offering the bran to God and keeping the flour [426] to ourselves. Is this what is meant by fellowship? Let us see.

Koinonia, here rendered fellowship, is not a term of doubtful import. In classic use koinos signifies common, shared in common; in social and political relations, common to all the people, public, the common weal; of disposition, lending a ready ear to all, impartial; connected by common origin, kindred, especially of brothers and sisters. These are its principal classic uses, as given by Liddell and Scott. The same authority defines it communion, community, intercourse. Its sacred use is given in New Testament lexicons as fellowship, partnership, participation, communion, aid, relief, contribution in aid.

It will be seen, at a glance, that unless the Scriptures make a rigorous application of this term to some one specific act or ordinance, the word itself would suggest nothing of the kind, but would rather lead us to think of community of interest or of obligation--of the spiritual kinship established in Christ, the partnership of duties, of interest, and of destiny which is peculiar to the great brotherhood called the church of God.

We ask, then, Do the Scriptures limit this term to a specific act or ordinances The best answer to this is found in the texts in which the word occurs:

Acts 2:42: "They continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship." [427]

Rom. 15:26: "To make a certain contribution."

1 Cor. 1:9: "Called unto the fellowship of his Son."

1 Cor. 10:16: "Is it not the communion of the blood? is it not the communion of the body of Christ?"

2 Cor. 6:14: "What communion hath light with darkness?"

2 Cor. 8:4: "And take upon us the fellowship."

2 Cor. 9:13: "For your liberal distribution."

2 Cor. 13:14: "The communion of the Holy Ghost."

Gal. 2:9: "The right hands of fellowship."

Eph. 3:9: "What is the fellowship of the mystery?"

Phil. 1:5: "For your fellowship in the gospel."

Phil. 2:1: "If any fellowship of the Spirit."

Phil. 3:10: "And the fellowship of his sufferings."

Philemon 6: "That the communication of thy faith."

Heb. 13:16: "And to communicate forget not."

1 John 1:3: "May have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father."

1 John 1:6: "If we say that we have fellowship."

1 John 1:7: "We have fellowship one with another."

We add to these the occurrences of [428]

Matt. 23:30: "We would not have been partakers."

Luke 5:10: "Which were partners with Simon."

1 Cor. 10:18: "Partakers of the altar."

1 Cor. 10:20: "Ye should have fellowship with."

2 Cor. 1:7: "As ye are partakers of the sufferings."

2 Cor. 8:23: "He is my partner and fellow-helper."

Philemon 17: "If thou count me, therefore, a partner."

Heb. 10:33: "Ye became companions of them."

1 Pet. 5:1: "And also a partaker of the glory."

2 Pet. 1:4: "Be partakers of the divine nature. "

It will be readily seen that the term is not restricted to a special use--is limited to no specific application as indicating a particular act or observance of a particular ordinance; but is freely used to express almost every phase of that precious spiritual fellowship which links Father, Son and Holy Spirit with those who are baptized into these sacred names, and all the baptized in one great copartnery. The joint privileges, responsibilities and duties of all the members of this spiritual family, as well as their common relationship to God as their Father, to the Son as their Redeemer, [429] and to the Holy Spirit as their Comforter, all find expression in this word.

It is readily granted that this word is sometimes used in reference to money--joint contributions for benevolent purposes. It is not only readily granted, but we are anxious to have it known, that it may be fully understood that in regard to outlays of money for all good purposes there is a joint responsibility--a partnership, from the duties of which no member of the firm is to be allowed to escape. But what we now are desirous to impress upon our readers is, that this does not exhaust the applications of the word; that it has a much wider range, and conveys a much larger idea of our relationships and duties, than can be found in it when this specific application is urged. It expresses partnership in the blessings of the death of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16); in the strength and comfort of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14); in the sufferings of Christ (Phil. 3:10); in all the blessings of the gospel (Phil. 1:5); in the favor and protection of God (1 John

1:3).

Nor is it necessary to deny that there is a somewhat special use of the term in the immediate application of it in Acts 2:42. Verses 44 and 45 favor the idea that in its first use it was meant to describe that generous outflow of regenerated hearts in which all participated; but as none of those for whom we are now writing insist on this as any part of the permanent order of the church, [430] we have a general agreement that this does not exhaust the import of the fellowship, and that we must seek further for a full comprehension of its meaning.

The passage most nearly parallel with Acts 2:42 is 1 John 1:3: "The things which we have seen and heard declare we unto you [the apostles' doctrine], that ye also may have fellowship with its; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full."

In the light of the classical and spiritual import of this term, we are constrained to regard the church of God as a grand partnership, in which God and man come into most intimate relations. In this firm there are divine partners--the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit; and these three agree in one. There are also human partners. All who are baptized into the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit enter into partnership with God and with each other, for certain clearly defined purposes.

In brief, these objects are: (1) To redeem a world of perishing sinners from ignorance, sin and death; (2) to educate such as are saved for the dignities and felicities of immortality. To lift men of all nations and all generations from death to life, from sin to holiness, from vileness and shame to glory and honor, and make the heirs of wrath and ruin the inheritors of heaven's immortal [431] honors and delights--this is the mighty enterprise which God has set on foot, to which Father, Son and Holy Spirit give their united treasures of wisdom, love and power, and in which they invite the co-operation of all who have hearts to love and hands to toil.

We stand in the presence of this stupendous scheme, awed into reverence and adoration, and seem to hear the voice of God sounding in our ears: "Take off thy shoes from thy feet, for the ground whereon thou standest is holy ground." To us it is idle to ask for other evidence of the divine origin of the gospel. Any one familiar with the workings of his own heart, or the history of the human race, knows the inevitable tendency to ever-increasing selfishness. The history of our race is a history of grasping selfishness. Self, kindred, sect, country--these exhaust the love and sympathy of the human heart; and ever the free play of these is disturbed within these narrow circles by selfish antagonisms. But philanthropy--where does that dwell? Who loves the race? What school of uninspired ethics ever taught this sublime virtue? Even after enjoying the light of Christ's teachings for eighteen hundred years, the world and the church are controlled by narrow selfishness; the great lessons of philanthropy are not half comprehended; the earth is drunk with blood; the groans of the oppressed issue even from under the altar; the narrow and [432] virulent spirit of sect is the highest inspiration of most religious movements; and

"Man's inhumanity to man

Makes countless thousands mourn."

When we see through what slow and painful processes men are enabled to grasp the conception which the gospel furnishes of the love of man as man, and how utterly unworthy are our best conceptions of what is due to our fellow-creatures, who can believe that the selfish heart of man ever gave birth to such a

scheme of benevolence as the New Testament unfolds? "Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one." Talk not of miracles and prophecies. The grandest of all miracles is the sinless Sufferer dying to redeem the race that scorned Him; and all the tongues and harps of prophets are hushed into dead silence before that matchless oracle, "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth on him might not perish, but have eternal life." Philosophy is dumb; the worthiest religions are abashed; the glories of the grandest empires fade into nothingness; sages, poets, statesmen, heroes--even the purest and best of them--are nothing, and less than nothing, and altogether vanity, when this founder of the everlasting age reveals His wonderful counsel, and projects this divine scheme of the universal brotherhood of man under the Fatherhood of God. [433]

Into this grand partnership all true believers enter. In it they stand on one common platform as brethren in the Lord. All the selfish and wicked distinctions prevailing in human society are lost. There is neither Jew nor Greek, neither male nor female, neither bond nor free, but all are one in Christ Jesus. Redeemed from a common ruin by a common ransom, and made heirs of a common inheritance, they meet on the common level of Christian brotherhood--the rich rejoicing that he is made low, the poor that he is exalted, and all that they are the sons and daughters of the Lord Almighty. No ecclesiastical dignitaries are allowed to take the place of the Lord and be called master. "All ye are brethren." All are priests to God; all constitute God's clergy or heritage (1 Pet. 5:3). The least in the kingdom is, by virtue of his redemption and sanctification in Christ Jesus, greater than the greatest official dignitaries (Matt. 11:11). Nay, it is more to be a member of this grand copartnership than to be the brightest and highest angel in heaven; for the latter are all ministering servants of the former (Heb. 1:14), and in their highest ministries they are honored with no such mission as belongs to the members of this fellowship.

Let it now be said--and this brings us into the very heart of our subject--that every one coming into this partnership brings with him all his capital, and invests it all in the common stock for the benefit of the firm. [434]

The highest, deepest, vastest treasures of divine wisdom, love, power, holiness, justice, truth, mercy, compassion and condescension are invested in this scheme. The ineffable glories and riches of Father, Son and Holy Spirit are embarked in it. "The unsearchable riches of Christ," "the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God," and the "deep things" of the Spirit, are all funded for the benefit of this enterprise. The universe is laid under tribute; the wealth of the ages belongs to it.

Every convert brings into the common treasury all that he owns. In this fellowship "no man lives to himself." It is written over the door of entrance, "Ye are not your own." It is a mistake to suppose that having "all things common" was peculiar to the church in Jerusalem. That particular form of bestowal and distribution evidently grew out of peculiar circumstances; but in principle and in essence the religion is the same; and, although a change in circumstances may work a change in the incidents of giving, the duty of bringing our all and laying it down at the apostles' feet, to be appropriated under apostolic authority, is the same now as then--and the Ananiases and Sapphiras who keep back part of the price will yet be carried out dead, as liars against the Spirit of God.

We are aware that these are "hard sayings," and that many will ask, "Who, then, can be [435] saved" We can only reply, "With men these things are impossible, but with God all things are possible." It is time that all who are "at ease in Zion" had a "woe" sounded in their ears that may startle them from their false security. It is time to strip off the delusive idea that any acceptance of doctrine, or any formal observance of ordinances, can avail to save a soul that refuses entire consecration of all its powers to the great aims

of the church of God. It is especially due to the integrity of the gospel and the purity of the church that the narrow and mean selfishness which gives to God its tithings of mint and anise and cummin, and reserves for the lusts of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life, its wealth of devotion, service and money, should be branded as an accursed thing, and banished without the camp.

As individual stewards of God, we have a control of our means which others have not, and have a right to employ our resources, under a sense of our personal accountability to the Master, but as partners in this great scheme, we owe to the firm our just share of toil and of money, and of whatever we possess that the partnership needs. We speak not of money only nor chiefly, but of whatever we possess that the common cause requires. "Freely ye have received, freely give." "For we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another." [436]

We have said that the ordinary bases of human distinction are ignored in this brotherhood. There is no aristocracy of wealth, nor of intellect, nor of blood. All these are perishable; but the heart may grow forever. Goodness is immortal. Love is more than all knowledge, all eloquence, all power. This brotherhood, therefore, is based on character--on the possession of the love of God in the heart; for "he that loveth is born of God and knoweth God."

There is, however, a variety of gifts, and there must be wisdom and economy in their appropriation. While, then, all the members of this fellowship stand on a common platform of dignity as children of God, it does not follow that there shall be no official distinctions--no division of labor. God has wisely distributed His gifts so that every one shall have need of His brethren, and all His brethren shall have need of Him. This mutual dependence makes society indispensable, and saves us from lawless invasions of the rights of others. But as equal partners in a mercantile firm, possessing different gifts, will make such a division of labor as will enable every one to work most successfully for the benefit of all--one acting as bookkeeper, another as salesman, another at tending to the purchases, another to collections, etc.--so, here, wisdom demands that the variety of gifts shall be classified, and their possessors assigned to such departments of service as will [437] render them most useful to the interests of the partnership. To illustrate:

1. Here is one on whom is bestowed the "gift of tongues." He is an orator. He brings his treasures of eloquence and lays them down at the feet of the apostles. Now, he is under no more obligations to preach the gospel than any other member of the church, except as his gift lies in that direction. It is the business of the partnership to preach the gospel, but the law of the apostles--the directors of this enterprise--is: "As every one has received the gift, so let him minister." "But," this brother says, "I have a family to support; the duty to provide for them is imperative; I can not preach only subordinately to their maintenance." But other members of the partnership come forward and say: "You can preach better than we; can make money better than you. You attend to our preaching--we will see to your money-making. You preach--we will make money; and we will share. We will be partners in your preaching, and you shall be a partner in our money-making." This is "fellowship." The preaching and the money-making are alike in the firm.

2. Here is one gifted to rule--a rare gift. It is all-important that it be made available for the general good; and if the general interests require that his whole time be given to this work, then the partnership must see that while he attends to [438] their interests, they attend to his. So of teachers, ministers, etc. If the partnership demands all their time, or a considerable portion of it, they must be maintained by the partnership. And then righteousness requires that, in the service of the partnership, they religiously render service equivalent to that which they receive from it. If there must be an end to the selfishness and penuriousness of church-members, there must also be an end to the indolence of preachers. The round of

easy visits at favorite resorts--the daily snooze the tours of idle gossip--the week-long loungings, fishings and recreations--must give place to hard study and hard work for those who are working for him; and, we opine, there will be less complaint of poorly paid preachers when they earn a fair title to compensation by incessant toil, such as other callings demand in order to success.

3. Praying, singing, exhorting--gifts in these directions are not equally distributed. A wise division of labor in these departments is essential to the complete edification of the church. It should be understood that none is at liberty to withhold the talents which could be employed for the general good, but that, under the direction of the competent authorities, every one shall bring in his capital into the fellowship.

4. Money-making is a gift. Some men are evidently sent into this world on purpose to make money; and, in spite of pulpit homilies and [439] diatribes to the contrary, we hold that those whose gifts from God fit them for successful business life, may "buy and sell and get gain" as religiously as they can pray or sing, and as much "to the glory of God." In no paths of life are there better opportunities to glorify God than in the daily walks of business life, in perpetual contact with men, and amid phases of life and revelations of heart that show the surest avenues to the judgment and conscience, for men's salvation. The error is not in making money, nor so much in bending one's energies to the task--for "whatever is worth doing is worth doing well"; but it is in failing to bring the gift into the partnership. These money-makers must learn to continue steadfastly in the "fellowship"; and if they refuse to do so, they ought, after due admonition and patient effort to save them, to be dismissed from the firm. The man of wealth is under as sacred an obligation to bring his money into the partnership as is the orator to bring his gifts of speech, or the musician his gifts of song, or the ruler his ability to govern. Nor, if we have a multiplicity of gifts, can the appropriation of any one of them be accepted in lieu of the others. If we combine wealth and the ability to rule, or the ability to preach, we can not make the bestowal of the gift of preaching a reason for withholding the gift of money, any more than the eyes can insist on rendering precisely equal service with the nose, or the [440] hands with the feet. Every member of the body is under obligations to render all the service it can for the general weal; and, whether that be much or little, all the other members are partakers of its benefits. The principle is still true which is expressed in the Old Testament: "They that gathered much had nothing over; and they that gathered little had no lack."

5. There are many other gifts which we will not take space to enumerate here, which a wise supervision of the interests, wants and capacities of the church will call into exercise. It may be safely laid down as a principle that no member of the partnership should remain unemployed.

This gives to the eldership in our churches a much more responsible task than is generally allowed to them, or than they are willing to accept. An overseer, in this partnership, should learn of the various gifts at his disposal. He should be a good judge of men--capable of seeing at a glance the places to be filled, and the persons best qualified to fill them. He should be able to train them for their work, and to go before them in it.

"And as a bird each fond endearment tries

To tempt its new-fledged offspring to the skies,

He tries each art, reproves each dull delay,

Allures to brighter worlds, and leads the way."

When we come to understand the working character of the church, the selection of overseers and [441] guides will be a much graver task than at present, and the work of an overseer will be found to demand the highest and rarest qualifications, and daily and hourly attention. Moreover, the insubordination now so prevalent will be condemned as dishonorable and injurious to the general interest, and it will be required that when the appointed rulers direct any one to a given work, it shall be accepted, unless there are satisfactory reasons for declining the task. Let the reader turn to Romans 12 and 1 Corinthians 12 and give them careful attention, and he can not fail to be convinced that the ideal church presented to us in the New Testament is that of a community bound by common ties in a spiritual communism, to the prosperity of which every member is bound to communicate to the full extent of his or her ability; and that its variety of ministries is under a suitable headship. This is the "fellowship" of the Scriptures. The doorkeeper and the ruler--the orator and the janitor--are partners in a mutual work.

But while we pass by numerous ministries which a wise oversight will provide for, there are some strangely neglected services to which we feel bound to call special attention.

Why is it that Christian women find so little employment in the service of the church? Not only is their position inferior, but it is largely useless. They do indeed make a little work for [442] themselves in a Dorcas society; they are sometime dignified as deaconesses--it being understood that the sum of their duties is to prepare female candidates for baptism; and if a festival is called for to coax money out of unwilling hands for the purchase of a church carpet, or a new stove-pipe, the culinary skill of the sisters is invoked right earnestly. But except in occasional service of this kind, the sum of woman's duty in the church is to listen reverently, and, with a hymn-book before her, to sing by note. We can not forbear asking, Why this persistent refusal to enlist the warm devotions and generous sympathies and earnest activities of woman in this high service? She is more religious than man. She has greater powers of endurance in patient toil and suffering. There is abundant work which can best be done under the promptings of womanly instincts, and by the gentleness of womanly ministrations. Does not the apostle say, "There is neither male nor female"? Let it be granted that there are duties from which her sex and her peculiar organization debar her. Are there not duties enough left for which she is admirably adapted?

Her loving ministries in behalf of the despised Nazarene are among the most touching illustrations of faith and devotion in the Gospel narratives; her steadfast adherence to the Man of sorrows is marred by no cowardice, disgraced by no treachery. [443]

"Not she with traitorous kiss her Saviour stung,

Not she denied Him with unholy tongue;

She, when apostles shrank, could dangers brave--

Last at the cross, and earliest at the grave."

In the primitive church she shared the labors and honors of the partnership. The women with the men continued, "with one accord," in prayer and supplication till the hour of Pentecostal solemnity and triumph. The promised Spirit came to the daughters as well as to sons--to the maidens equally with the young men. Dorcas, Lydia, the daughters of Philip, Phoebe, Priscilla, Euodias and Syntyche are specimens of the active ministers of the church who, in various capacities, were "fellow-workers" with the apostles and brethren. Let us mention some kinds of active service in which godly women might find useful employment.

1. In our cities and large towns there are thousands and tens of thousands of neglected people who never attend church, and whose moral condition would be an offense even to heathenism. They can only be reached by personal visitations, by benevolent attentions, by schools and religious meetings conducted in their midst. There are also thousands of outcasts, driven to a life of shame by the heartlessness of society and the wrongs of offenders who go unwhipped of justice. They are encompassed with the horrors of utter hopelessness, and sink into the depths of crime under the irresistible pressure of a false public sentiment. We [444] can not burden this paper with the startling statistics which are now before us--a fearful dishonor to any Christian land.

Now, our ministers and elders and leading men excuse themselves, on the score of pressing engagements, from any labors in these directions; and, generally, we are inclined to regard the excuse as just. But here are intelligent and godly women, who have to toil for daily bread, to whom this would be a welcome work. A very moderate compensation would enlist them at once. They would glide like angels of mercy through these dark scenes of woe and despair, and in the name of Jesus open the prison doors of captive souls, bind up broken hearts, and make known to them that sit in darkness the light of life. Why are they not employed? Who can tell? With the large wealth of intelligence and sympathy and strength that lies idle in our churches, is it possible to go before God free from the blood of these perishing souls?

2. There are much-needed ministries to be established among the homeless sick and dying. Homes, hospitals, asylums, refuges, are needed for the victims of misfortunes. It is the work of the church. It is woman's work. The state may attempt to accomplish it, and we may attempt to stifle our consciences by the reflection that we have paid our taxes; but there is a work for the church which the state can not do--spiritual ends [445] to be sought which can be reached through no state machinery, and a sympathetic labor to be accomplished which no state system can command. Women like Elizabeth Fry, Dorothea Dix, Florence Nightingale, and the nameless host of worthies who, during our late war, were present on battlefield, in the march, in the ambulance, and in every hospital, abundantly and gloriously illustrate the capacity, bravery, endurance and administrative ability of woman in such work. The growing power of the Roman Catholic Church in this country is asserted over the best class of converts by the gentle and loving ministries of her sisterhoods. It is more invincible than logic. You argue in vain in the presence of toilsome, patient and gentle ministries that touch every heart and bring tears to every eye. It hides a multitude of sins. Unless Protestants awake to the demands of the times, and furnish at least equal proofs of needed benevolence, they will be shorn of their power. The power of the primitive church was largely in her divine charities; the church of to-day must not be wanting in this particular, or learning, eloquence, wealth and respectability will not be sufficient to save her from disgrace.

3. The mission work, at home and abroad, opens many channels of usefulness for woman. Where the heaviest amount of labor is private rather than public--and this is the case in almost all new missionary fields--woman can be the ready [446] and efficient helper of man. In our own land, among the freedmen, there is employment for thousands of patient, gentle, pious women; and the church has them and ought to send them.

We pretend not to have exhausted, in our statement, the opportunities for profitable employment for Christian women; but we have said enough to show that there are such opportunities, and that it is a great folly, if not a great sin, on the part of the church, to shut out so much of her worthiest force from participation in the "fellowship" of labor and of reward.

If we have said but little of money as belonging to the fellowship, it is not because we deem it unimportant, but rather because that phase of the subject has been faithfully sketched by other pens, while those phases which have engaged our attention have been largely overlooked. We take occasion to say, however, that in money, as in all other elements of power, there must be partnership. It is but a partial restoration of the "ancient order of things" which leaves this unaccomplished. While we are not convinced that there is any divine law prescribing a uniform method of raising money, we are quite sure that, as a general rule, the method prescribed by Paul to the Corinthians and Galatians is the cheapest, easiest, justest and most effective of all known expedients: "On the first day of every week let every one lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him." This [447] will always give money in hand, will save all expensive agencies, will keep churches out of debt, and enable them to appropriate to their various benevolent enterprises a fair proportion of means. He who shall educate the churches to faithfulness in this particular will render to the cause of God a service of incalculable value.

Before closing we must offer a few suggestions touching another and most important phase of this subject--fellowship with God and with Christ.

There are many Christian lives that partake more of the bondage of the law than of the liberty of the gospel. They lack sunshine. They are consciously far away from "the fellowship of the Spirit." They are unblest with any divine manifestations, uncomforted with any "earnest of the inheritance." It is all tame and hard drudgery. They sigh for the light of God's countenance, and sigh in vain. Tell them to read the Scriptures, and they will confuse you with assertions of its utter fruitlessness in their own experience. Urge them to pray, and they will tell you that all their prayers have failed to produce one rift in the clouds that hang in thick darkness over them.

These are cases which need to be treated in the light of these teachings concerning fellowship. A man may live in the church, and share

"Her sweet communion, solemn vows,

Her hymns of love and praise,"

and still fail of joyful fellowship with his brethren. Why? Because he is not a partner with them in their toils and anxieties. He sings, but he does not work; he prays, but he does not pay; he communes in the Supper, but he does not commune in the sacrifices and toils and cares of the house of God. Consequently, "there is a great gulf" between him and them; while they are rejoicing over the fruits of their labors, and happy in projecting new toils, his barren heart pines in desolation. He lives in the midst of love without enjoying it. He must come on to the same plane of labor and suffering with them if he would enjoy their fellowship. And if such a failure shuts one out from the fellowship of his brethren, is it strange that it should shut him out from the fellowship of God? Not at all. Prayer is indispensable to this fellowship; so is Bible knowledge; but these are not all. A man can not pray himself into fellowship with the suffering Christ; he must suffer with Him. He can not read himself into fellowship with the loving Christ; he must give himself to similar labors of love, and in such experiences as that life gives him he will be able to interpret the heart of Christ and enter into its sympathies. There will be no lack of influx of heavenly light and peace when we place our souls in a position to receive it. But religion is not mere sentiment, nor a mere creed, nor a ritual; it is a life. He who would know its treasures must partake of its life. "If a man [449] love me, he will keep my sayings; and he shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." "Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If any man hear my voice, and

open the door, I will come in and sup with him, and he with me." But the voice of Jesus calls us to share His labors and His sorrows; and if we "open the door," it is to bid Him welcome to take us and guide us into His own paths of self-abnegation and self-sacrifice. It is only in some Gethsemane that we can understand the tempests that swept over His soul, or know the sweet peace--that succeeded; only when the world has altogether forsaken us that we can see the strong angel of God at our side; only through the cross that we can reach the crown. The poor woman who cast her living into the treasury of the Lord could have better interpreted the sayings and doings of Jesus, and have approached into a more immediate intimacy with Him, than the most learned and acute of selfish, carnal, ease-loving Pharisees or Sadducees in the land. It is thus that His counsels are hidden from the wise and prudent, and revealed unto babes.

It can not but be evident, in the light of the considerations we have submitted, that our churches have by no means fully entered into "the fellowship." We have resources enough to fulfill our mission, but they fail of appropriation. There is no genuine partnership of labor and of [450] expenditure. The mass of our membership exhaust their piety in church-going, sermon-listening, and the payment of such trifling sums as must be paid to maintain a respectable standing. The genuine workers are few; so are the voluntary contributors. There is no consecration of all to Christ--no laying down of all our treasures at the apostles' feet. The result is leanness, barrenness, impotency. We are smitten with mildew and blasting--the locusts and caterpillars eat up our substance. We receive as we give. We give little to God, and we receive little in return. We are shut out from the highest joys of spiritual fellowship, because we shut ourselves out from its highest duties. We are looking for happiness in a wrong direction. We seek it in selfishness, in ease, in the world's voluptuousness; it is found in giving, in toiling, in suffering, in condescension, in compassion, in self-denial for others' good.

The abode of happiness is in Bethlehem, in Gethsemane, at Calvary, and in the eternal home of love and joy to which these only lead. We can only know the "power of Christ's resurrection" after we have known "the fellowship of his sufferings," and have been made "conformable to his death." The beatitudes of the Sermon on the Mount distill not in the souls that riot in abundance and revel in selfish enjoyments. Heaven's immortal fellowships belong only to a brotherhood of heroic and patient sufferers, who have "come [451] up out of great tribulation, and washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb."

Man of sorrows! divine Sufferer! toiling Son of God! teach us to be willing to know the fellowship of Thy labors and Thy sorrows, and to give our little all to Thee, who gayest all for us. Then shall we have fellowship with each other; then will Thy blood cleanse us from all sin; then shall we have unclouded views of Thy glory, and rise to the possession of the everlasting fellowship of heavenly rest and joy. [452]

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