

# Fellowship in Christ

by Paris Reidhead

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of fellowship and sharing in the Christian life, and how it's a result of a spiritual relationship with God.*

**Duration:** 30:38

**Topics:** "Christ"

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## Description

In this sermon, the speaker focuses on the company of believers described in Acts chapter 4. He emphasizes that this group of believers were all failures and sinners, united by their bankruptcy and weakness. Despite their shortcomings, they shared a common bond of having their sins forgiven by Jesus. The speaker highlights the importance of finding true freedom in serving and pleasing God, and belonging to a community of believers who have experienced the supernatural work of the Holy Spirit in their hearts.

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## Transcript

Will you turn, please, to the portion that was read in Acts chapter 4. The fourth chapter of the book of Acts relates to us the effect of God's working. Peter and John had, on just one of the days of the week, gone into the temple at the hour of prayer for the purpose of assembly at the worship and with others of their own group that would come, for they felt even at this time, some have suggested as long as four years after Pentecost, that it was possible to remain a faithful, effective worshiper through the rites and traditions of Judaism. You see, God had given a period of rest to the Church after Pentecost, a period when they could gather their strength, consolidate the three thousand that had come to believe on the Lord.

They went daily to the temple for the stated hours of service there, and apparently the believers would gather some time during the day for a time of Christian fellowship. And thus, this particular day, Peter and John were on their way into the temple, and they passed the lame man. Notable, he'd been apparently at this same place begging for many years.

It was nothing unusual to Peter and John. They'd passed undoubtedly for many days, but something happened. You see, they'd come from a place of fellowship.

It's after all, fellowship that concerns us. Fellowship, this word *koinonia*, sharing, participation, communion. They'd come from fellowship.

God had been wonderfully manifest in their midst. Now as they pass this lame man, Peter looks upon him, senses that he has faith to be healed. A lot of things are left unsaid in the narrative.

We don't know what conversation they'd had previously. Undoubtedly, the lame man knew Peter and John, for they would have gone that way as a custom. But this we know, that on this particular day, they sensed by the illumination of the Holy Ghost that he had faith to be healed, and they had faith for his healing.

So Peter stopped, spoke to him, and said, Wouldst thou be made whole in the name of Jesus Christ, rise up and walk? And he did, and went leaping, and jumping, and dancing, praising the Lord, making his way into the temple, and creating holocaust every step he took. People assembled, throng pressed upon him, and he said, Now here's the man, and there's the man. These are the two by whom I've come to this place of health.

Well, it isn't long until Peter's using it for a gospel service. You see, there's something right here and wrong about us. In the New Testament they preached where the people were.

They went to them and preached. Now customarily we try to bring the people to where we are. And I'm wondering if the open-air campaigners that have been in the city off and on for several years and are coming on a permanent basis at the first of the year, do not have something of the answer for our reaching our metropolitan area.

They went where the people were. And so the throng is gathered, Peter preaches, and that day some 5,000 believe. Wonderful.

But remember, this world is no friend of grace. However, some working moratorium may be established so that we can get along for a little while. This world is no friend of grace.

It just requires an event to crystallize the sentiment and the feeling that had been lying dormant the while. And the Sadducees and the Pharisees are not the least pleased with this. They haven't known quite what to do.

There'd been no occasion up until now. But with a throng, with 5,000 converts, something has to be done. The time has come to take a stand.

And thus Peter and John are called before the authorities, the captain of the temple, that is the Levite who was in charge of the soldiers that would have been there to police this place and keep from any rowdyism or disturbance. They arrested them, took them in to the assembled elders, where they were forced to give an account of their conduct. By what name? By Beelzebub? By the Prince of Darkness? By some false gods, some cult? By what name? Have you done this? And the answer was in the name of Jesus.

So, knowing it was a notable miracle, and that a great multitude had heard of it, they threatened them, said, do not do this again. They forbade them to preach in that name and sent them away. Now, this meant that Peter and John were facing an edict that affected not only them, but the whole church.

The order of the group before which they'd appeared was that they immediately, as of that moment, silence all proselyting, all preaching. It was finished, it was over, they were through. Well, what did they do? And being let go, they went to their own company.

What happens to you when you are let go? If you did today just exactly what you want to do, what would you do? You see, you aren't what you're going to do. You are what you want. I made that statement the other day.

We've got to understand that character is not equated with conduct. There are many reasons why people will moderate their conduct. There may be social approbation or approval that they seek.

There may be fear of reprisal. A person is not what he does, he is what he wants. And Peter and John, being let go, free to depart, did not run for the caves to hide and thus disassociate themselves.

On one occasion, you remember, when Peter was let go, he was cursing, said, I know not the man. He used his freedom to denounce his Lord. Now, there's a bodily threat.

At that time, there wasn't particularly. What does Peter do? There's been some change in his character. There's been some dramatic alteration of his person, his nature.

What is he doing? Is he saying to Peter, John, now look, things are getting difficult here, and persecution is going to break out. It's time for us to forget this bunch of Christians we've been associated with. After all, there's problems back there.

They're fighting with the widows, and over who's going to get the proper amount of food. The Jewish widows are getting more, the Greek widows say, and oh, this isn't what we thought it was going to be. Let's use this as an excuse now to just travel and get out of here.

This is what they might have done. No one could have stopped it, or they could have said, well, we don't like this, but there would have been fear, some other motivation that would have moved them to this kind of conduct. But this isn't what happened.

Being let go, they went to their own company. Is this what happens to you? I was so happy today in going visiting the international students class to meet two young men that were here on a training ship from Brazil and was informed that there were some 12 or 13 on this training ship that are evangelicals. And being let go on the Lord's day, they went to their own company, and they came to the door and said, we're looking for Christians that love the Lord Jesus as do we.

Sailors in New York City, perhaps the first time they visited. Oh, what a great number of places they might have gone. What a great number of things they might have done.

But you see, being let go, they went to their own company. What happens to you when you're let go? What happens to you when restraints are off? What happens to you when there's no one there that knows you and no one that watches? Here were these that had found true freedom in a bondage to one so big, so good that they could commit themselves wholly to him. This is, after all, the only true freedom, the freedom of a voluntary servitude, a bond slavery to one whom we love and whose the person is so important and whose service is so important that we're prepared to sacrifice everything to please him.

Now, there was a company to which they belong. Have you found a company to which you belong? A group of people of which you're a part by the sovereign and the supernatural operation of the Holy Ghost? Are these your people because something has happened in your heart that's made you one with them? Oh, there are many ways that you can belong to a company by intellectual convictions, by emotional affiliation, by family affiliation. There are many different ways that you can become part of any group and

particularly part of a church.

But these had partaken of the same life. Sinners, they'd come to a savior and they'd known pardon and cleansing and deliverance from the guilt of the past. Guilty, they'd come to know the washing away of all the stains of memory that defiled and corrupted and polluted and burned like a cancer in their hearts and minds.

Weak, they'd come to one that was able to make them strong. Vacillating and impetuous, they'd come to one that was able to give them that kind of character that they themselves didn't possess, kind that was exhibited by Peter's behavior. And so, they're part of a company of people that brought the need to one that was able to provide it.

This is what characterized the company. They were all failures. They were all sinners.

The one thing they had in common was their bankruptcy and their weakness and their powerlessness. The one thing they shared was the fact that they had nothing to share but their sin. Strange company, isn't it? This, he said, go out into the highways and find the lame, the ones who can't walk in the law of God, and find the blind, the one that can't see the right way, and find the deaf that can't hear and the dumb that can't speak.

Go find the hopeless and bring them to my banquet, and they'll eat of the gifts of grace that I provide. And the lame aren't going to be lame anymore, not because they're any better, but because that food of which they've partaken is able to change them. And so it is that there's a company now to which they belong, and they know they belong, and they feel part of it, because they came in bankruptcy, and they came in hopelessness, and they came in helplessness.

And they ate of bread, bread that had come down from heaven, and in the eating were made whole. And so they're a company of the off-scouring of the world. That's why it wasn't a particularly large company or a particularly popular company.

Oh, if it could have been the wise that had been called, would have been an entirely different number. If it had been the educated, if it had been the powerful. And here is a company.

Do you belong to this company? Do you belong to this company of the weak? Do you belong to this company of the hopeless? Do you belong to this company of those that had nothing to offer but a mountain of guilt, a world of sin? You came in need, met a Savior. Oh, then you understand. And though you might have been deaf, you look at the neighbor who was dumb, and you see the one that was lame or half.

And your problem might not have been the same, yet you were all at the gate as beggars. Blessed are the poor in spirit, the tokos, the broken, the beggarly in respect to the spirit. Did you come that way? Do you belong to this company? And when they got there, they immediately put into practice a verse that is little understood by us, verse 32.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul. Neither said any of them that all of the things which he possessed was his own, but they had all things common. Well, Peter said, silver and gold have I none, so we know what he didn't possess.

Now, what did he have? He had a threat. A threat that if he spoke again in the name of Jesus, he'd be arrested, and he would be sentenced to death, and they had the power of seeing that he was executed. That's quite a possession to have, isn't it? How would you like to have that handed to you today, that if you assemble hereafter with the people called Christians, you are subject to arrest? Would you immediately go and say, oh, isn't it wonderful? Look what the Lord has given me.

I have a possession. Well, Peter had no money. He had no gold.

He didn't have any political influence. He had very little education. In fact, he had nothing but a heart that was full of need, need that had been met by the broken heart of the Lord Jesus.

And so Peter and this group had all things in common. Well, you see, they were of one heart and of one soul. Well, of course they were one heart, evil hearts that had been cleansed, one soul, crippled that had been made whole.

And so now they're under the sentence and they're all affected by it. They've been forbidden to speak, and this includes them all. So now Peter and John run home and say, look what we have.

Look what's been given to us. And they share it. The point that is so important is this, that in the crisis, the group shared.

Oh, they might have said, now wait a minute, Peter, John. You're the ones that got into trouble. Now we're dissociating ourselves from you.

We just would prefer if you didn't meet with us anymore, because you carry a stigma with you. Their eye is on you. The rest of us haven't been in any trouble.

You get along with this thing now. You go out here and we just don't want you because we might be hurt if you stay with us. They could have said that, just as Peter and John could have fled.

No. They received the indictment. They received the prohibition that was put upon Peter and John as affecting all of them, as indeed it did.

And so they said, come tell us what is this. And they told all that the chief priests and the elders had said unto them, because they had all things common. One man's problem was the problem of the group.

Almost invariably, the church has failed to understand this principle. And I admit that I have had very little teaching in the past. When I come to speak to you on a series of messages, as the Lord leads, on koinonia, on fellowship, there's very little that I can get that's been prepared and given to the church.

Oh, there's a lot on the ecclesia, the called out group. But this is not ecclesia as much as it is koinonia. This is fellowship.

This is sharing. And there's very little. But this I do know that it wasn't just an economic relationship.

Oh, we do find a little further that they didn't lack anything because as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them. They didn't have a big bargain basement sale one Saturday when they sold everything. As there was need, a man was moved upon by the Lord.

He sold it and brought the price of the things that were sold. There wasn't any need sustained by the group because every member was a part of the group and they had all things in common. And the need of one was the need of all.

We do find here that Barnabas is the son of consolation. And undoubtedly, he earned this by his having land, selling it, and using this. Perhaps he's even the one who established the pattern.

And we do not find that it's commanded in the Scripture. We don't find anywhere that God lays this down as an economic rule of fellowship. And certainly it isn't forced sharing.

There's something that's happened to them. They've partaken of one bread. They've drunk of one cup.

They've shared in the risen life of the Lord. And because of this, they've one heart and one soul, one mind, one spirit, one interest. And it's all voluntary.

No one's coerced. No one's forced. To use this Scripture, as some do, as a vindication of what we call today communism is a gross distortion of the Scripture, because here there's perfect liberty and perfect freedom.

And there's no obligation at all, other than the obligation of love. But you see, this included not only the price of land, but here someone has to share his need. I can imagine some of these rabbis that had been converted, that had had property and were disinherited, finding it an extremely difficult thing to go to the church and say, my hands are empty, I've lost everything.

A great blow to a man's pride, you know, to have been the owner of goods, and now in this state in his life to find that he's penniless. And so somebody had to share his poverty. It's awfully, it's much easier to share your money, than your poverty.

Sometimes it's much easier to say, here, take my dollar than it is say, I haven't the dollar I needed. But there's a sharing. They had all things in common.

One man shares his weakness. One man shares his failure. One man shares his sin.

You mean he shares it how? Because having all things in common meant that what affected one affected all. And they were learning the principle of fellowship. They were learning the principle of participation, of communion, and sharing.

I think this is the most difficult aspect of the Christian life, unquestionably. And it's one where there's the least guidance, least literature. And yet, if I understand what's happening today, it is this, that possibly God is so determined to get koinonia, to get fellowship, that he's willing to allow governments to be swept away and freedom to be taken and liberty to disappear, so that in the crisis of mutual desperation, people will come on his terms to each other and to him.

But isn't it pathetic that it has to be this way? Isn't it sad that it should have to be brought to such a pass, that God would have to allow such stringent and difficult pressures to force his people to each other? I wonder what would be the story when China is open and the history is written. I wonder what's going to be shown. I don't for a moment think that the Chinese church has been exterminated.

Oh, I know that there's that show church that's there for the sake of Western visitors. But we also know, according to official publication, and this is the last I've heard, and I may be incorrect, that some 15 million

have been deprived of existence for the reason that their religious faith was incompatible with government interests. But I don't believe for a moment that 15 million can exterminate the church in China.

But you know, I think that somehow, in the midst of this, there's a koinonia, there's a fellowship, there's a participation, there's a sharing. It's been said that the church thrives most and best under persecution. And I am prepared to say this morning that unless American Christians begin to learn the meaning of sharing on a biblical level, I'm not talking about economics.

This is the byproduct of an understanding of a spiritual relationship. God is prepared to take away the freedoms, the independence, and some of the things we've taken so for granted in order to put us into those circumstances where we must share. I believe that it's far better that it should be done voluntarily.

I believe that this was not something precipitated by the experience. I'm sure that it was accentuated by, it was increased by, it was strengthened by, but I don't think it began there. In fact, we know it didn't because in Acts 2, right after Pentecost, there again, they had all things in common.

But the principle that is so important is this. Are you prepared to share? Are you a Christian in the sense that you've been partaking of one life with others, that you have come bankrupt and hopeless and helpless to the foot of the cross, bringing only your need, your guilt, your sin? And you have nothing more than the lowest of the low and the vilest of the vile? For had you a nice sinner that you were, then the only sinner would have been necessary for Jesus to have died as horrible a death as he did in order to have redeemed you. And that same death is adequate to redeem the vilest of the vile.

And so it is that we come in on one door and one level and one threshold. He doesn't have an upstairs window for nice sinners and a basement door for low sinners, as some might think. We came broken.

We came with nothing. He gave everything. Now, do we recognize that as Christians, we've been made part of a body, one mind, one heart? Have we learned to share? Have you learned to share your need? Have you learned to share your failure? Have you learned in brokenness to share your desire? What do we know of it? Oh, I wish somehow there was a test we could pass or take today to find what level of Christian we are in respect to this most important of things, koinonia.

How much fellowship do we know? Do we know how to have fellowship? Do we know what it means? That's why I've been so anxious through these years of seeing smaller groups. A service such as this is good in the sense that the apostles' doctrine can be presented. But oh, where's the fellowship, the koinonia, where you can respond and share? I speak of sharing, but when's the opportunity to share? Certainly not in the public service.

And there ought to be a time when those that are members of a body, perhaps it will come again, that there will be a discipline and there will be, as Wesley had, the love feast for those who were members of the society gathered, and absence for two months was sufficient reason, unless it was well explained, for their names to be read out of the society. And on one occasion he said the fellowship at Bristol, the Society of Bristol has this year suffered a loss of 800 members, but it has gained greatly in strength because of its loss. I don't know how many they had, but the point was that there was an important fellowship.

There was some sharing, there was koinonia. Do you understand this? Do you have it? Is there some Christian to whom you can be what you are, honest and open and broken and sincere? I believe that's

what they had, not just their danger, not just the threat. Anything that affects any member of the body of Christ is equally hazardous as was this threat of the officials.

Anything. And what I'm so concerned about today is that we, in our quest for all that God wants in the great needy city, should ask ourselves this, to what degree do we pass the test and measure this biblical standard of having one heart, of one soul, having all things in sharing, in fellowship? That's the word common. What's the effect of this? And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection, and the place where they were assembled together was shaken, and they were filled with the Holy Ghost.

I wonder if God isn't waiting for people that are prepared to meet him on these terms in order to reveal again the wonderful power of the risen Christ through the Holy Ghost. I'm frightened to tell you that in a city such as ours, spread as we are, scattered as we are, with odd working hours that we have and all the other hindrances, right now I haven't any program. I haven't any program.

I do believe that a layman's movement has to begin with a layman, or it isn't a layman's movement, it's just a superimposed clerical movement on the layman. That's one reason why I haven't organized. I'm grateful, for instance, seeing that there's a group meeting this week at the home of Florence Barber for prayer meeting, young people that'll meet to share.

Other groups meet other times. This much I do know, dear friends, that it was when they were together, in their need, in their openness, in their brokenness, one heart and one accord, having all things in fellowship, that the Spirit of God was poured upon them, the place was shaken, and with boldness they've given witness to the resurrection. Now there's the scripture, and there are you, and here am I. What are we going to do to put ourselves in the place where God can do with us what he wants to do in such a gray, needy city, mission-filled world as we are serving here in New York? You're part of it.

You're part, either part of the problem, or part of the answer, and possibly the Spirit of God may, through you, give some insight that will be a blessing to all of us. It seems to me that you ought to accept the responsibility as a very personal one, and ask the Lord to guide you. Shall we bow our hearts in prayer? Teach us what it means, Our Father, and they had all things in fellowship, in sharing, in participation, in communion, in common.

Help us to see it. We don't know now. There may come a time, Our Father, that thou wilt have to do for our land what thou hast allowed to be done for others.

We trust not. But, O God of grace, if it must come to that, prepare us today for that by laying hold of this text, meditating upon it, giving ourselves the study of it, until thou can implement it for us in the 20th century. We know that all 3,000 were in this room to which Peter and John came.

They couldn't have been there. There wasn't a room big enough in Jerusalem then. So, Father, we don't know just what it meant.

We don't know what it's going to mean for us, how it'll be implemented. But we believe thou art of the same mind still, that thy people that have one life, one Lord, one baptism, one hope, one faith, are also to understand what it means to have fellowship. We don't know.

We are asking to be taught. As little children, we come and sit at the feet, the nail-pierced feet of thy risen Son, and say, O Lord Jesus, doest seemeth good in thy sight, but get for thyself something that's thine, through which thou canst manifest how wonderful thou art. We've seen so much of what mighty men can

do for a needy Lord, and it's failed.

Now, Father, we want to see what a mighty Lord can do for needy men. And we put ourselves here, asking thee to teach us and lead us into thy Word, to embed the truth upon our hearts. Now, should there be one among us who does not know the joy of sins forgiven, might this be the hour when they open their heart's door, invite our risen Lord in to reign and to forgive a Savior and Lord.

He's waiting to do this. So grant it, Father, to some needy heart now. Let us stand, dear friends, for the benediction.

We're leaving you with the Word. We haven't a program. We have a scripture.

We have a text. We have a truth. Now, you will have to complete the message by finding out what God's application of this is to your heart.

Now unto him who is able to do exceeding abundantly above all we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us, unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

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