

Fellowship in Service

by Paris Reidhead

The sermon emphasizes the importance of recognizing our importance in the church and utilizing our spiritual gifts and abilities for the task at hand.

Duration: 36:43

Scripture: Acts 6:1

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker discusses the importance of studying and applying the principles of the Bible. He emphasizes that while they reject the theology of the Bible, they accept its practicality and use it to achieve their goals. The speaker also shares a personal encounter with the director of a Communist Workers' Training School, highlighting the contrast between their beliefs. The sermon concludes by addressing the problem of personality conflicts within the church and the need for fellowship restoration.

Transcript

Let us turn again, please, to Acts chapter 6. We are concerned about God's best for our lives. We serve this present generation and minister to those who live while we live. But we must enter into the fellowship of believers of all ages by drawing from the experience of others, both through the scripture and since the time the canon of the scripture was completed, those lessons that we need to serve him adequately.

And we're very grateful this morning that the Spirit of God gave to us this exact account, even though it represented problems. You see first in this sixth chapter the arising of a problem. It was a personality problem.

Almost invariably problems in any business or the home or the church or any activity or any organization are personality adjustment problems. Years ago at Mahaffey Camp meeting I made the statement that probably 95 percent of the problems on the mission field were personality adjustment problems. When I finished and at lunch the then area secretary for the Far East, now foreign secretary, Reverend L.L. King, said, you know, I have to take exception to your statistics offered this morning.

And I said that I wasn't surprised that I'd been in error so frequently that I was prepared to correct them, but in what particular and what statistics? And he said, you said 95 percent of the problems were personality adjustment problems. And I said, yes, and this I would affirm again. Can you correct me? He said, yes, I would.

I would tell you that in my estimation it's probably 99 and 44 one hundredths of the problems are personality adjustment problems. And that's what we have here. Fellowship is disturbed.

There's breaking up. We've seen the glory of God upon the fellowship. They shared a problem facing them of outside persecution.

Then there was the crisis that arose when one of their numbers sought to use the fellowship for his own aggrandizement and lied to the Holy Ghost. Ananias and Sapphira were slain by the Lord, indicating how important he considers the fellowship and how desirous he is at almost any price of protecting it and keeping it blessing. But you see, this was deliberate.

This was malicious on the part of Ananias and Sapphira. They agreed together. They decided that they would keep back part of the price.

This was a determined course, and God could visit this with judgment. I believe the problem in this first verse in the sixth chapter was not deliberate. It grew up because of nationality differences.

It grew up because of financial differences, problems that had their rise in circumstances that weren't deliberately set and fixed. Let me read it for you. In those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews because their widows were neglected in the daily ministrations.

This tells us several things. It tells us first that there was a great increase in the number of adherents to the testimony, and this with itself would create problems. Numbers are not always the blessing.

If we can increase without assimilating, our growth is the cause of our failure. And so they were having the problem of assimilation, of adjustment. Here there was great blessing, but there wasn't appropriate provision for it.

And so there was a daily ministrations. Some of these were poor that had come to Christ. Some were disenfranchised.

Rabbis and others were driven from their living and their means of livelihood. They were cut off from their families and their business, and they were in need. And so there was a daily sharing, a daily ministrations, and it was also for those that had no other means of support.

This speaks of the widows, those that were utterly dependent upon the love of the group for the supply of their needs. It teaches us further that there was a certain economic factor in the fellowship, that one's burden was the burden of all, and one's need was the need of all. And they were concerned about it.

Well, this is good, but the problem arises when the Greeks, that is, the Grecian, the dispersed, if you please, the people that had been out in Greece and elsewhere, the Jewish people, for they're all Jews, but some had lived in Jerusalem, and others had come in from areas where they lived. We find today that among the Jewish people there's a great deal of difference of feeling. Jews all, but some from Spain look down upon others from Russia, and some from Morocco feel a little inferior to those that have come from Germany, and there are nationality differences.

I heard it was with a Hebrew Christian brother this past week, and who spoke of a Jewish man that had come from India as though he were Indian instead of being a Jewish brother. There was nationality

difference because of culture and language and certain things that had been fixed to them. And so here, these Jews that had lived in Greece and in other parts of the empire felt that the ones that lived in Jerusalem and were the old timers, so to speak, had taken advantage for themselves, and that consequently their widows were overlooked.

I say it's a personality adjustment problem because it's based on traits, it's based on reactions. And, of course, we understand that in God's normal relationship for a Christian, our lives should never be on the basis of reaction. We ought to act, always to act.

We ought to think our way into our living instead of sort of living our way into our thinking. We find, I read some time ago an article in the Reader's Digest about a certain Quaker gentleman in New York that decided he would live his life and would not allow others to determine the kind of a person he would be. In the company of a friend, he went to the corner where he purchased, as was his custom, his evening newspaper.

The man, he spoke to him, good evening, Paul, how are you? And the man responded with a surly grunt. He said, and I hope you have good business tonight, and a second repetition of the ugh, and obviously discourteous and unconcerned. And as they walked away, his friend said, it seems so strange to me that you could be so polite to one who treated you this way.

Do you buy your paper here often? Oh yes, every night. Well, does he do this often? Oh, every night. Well, how come you are so courteous to this person? And he looked at him and smiled.

He said, you see, I have determined long ago that I wouldn't let anyone else decide the kind of a person I was going to be. I'm not going to go through life being shaped by those whom I meet. I'm not going to react.

I purpose to act in accord to what I believe is right and proper. This is a tendency. Most of the time that we get into difficulty and problem, it's because we have reacted.

We ought to be prepared for it. We ought to know what to do in certain circumstances. And instead of just emotionally reacting, we ought to have thought, after all, a number of experiences into which we can come after a few years of life is known to us, and it's rather limited.

And we aren't going to have too many surprising things happen after 25 or 30 years of life. We ought to know something of what we're planning to do when certain things happen, rather than just emotionally respond over and over again. We all do.

And when we get into trouble and difficulty, it's probably going to be that we have failed to act. And this is what happened here. So strife is growing up, unconsciously, not deliberately.

They're not seeking to ruin the fellowship. Ananias and Sapphira, as we said, did. But there must be a solution.

Well, the apostles are responsible. They have to consult together. When the Twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, they had something to present.

Usually a solution is found when some give their minds to the problem and dedicate their efforts and their thought to it. You ought to be the committee of one to dedicate your life to the matter of living triumphantly

for the glory of Christ in the area that he's assigned to you. It isn't going to--your problems are not going to be settled by this church.

Your problems aren't going to be settled by a group as large as this. Speaking of large groups meeting, one man said that when 12 of my people get together, we have 18 opinions. Each one has--or part of them have two.

And this is often the case. You're going to have to make up your mind that the problems that you face in your home with your family, the problems that you face in your business, the difficulties that you encounter in social relationships, are entrusted to you. And they're not going to be settled from the pulpit.

The pulpit can give you principles and give you direction, but the application of those principles is going to come to you. Now, you need not feel alone in this. There is the possibility of your having a smaller group, someone in whom you can confide, someone with whom you can have fellowship.

This is the reason why the class meetings of John Wesley serve such a noble function, because groups of 12 would meet that could get to know one another. The difficulty we face here is when this service is over. Many of you are going to leave.

You won't tarry long enough to speak. You forget that the people next to you are as much strangers, perhaps, as you are. I've had people in the presence, all of them in the presence of strangers, going out saying, my, those folks are unfriendly.

But you see, the people that they thought were members in regular attendance at the church were just as new and strange as they were. And so you're going to hurry out. You're going to go to your home.

Some other interest is going to come in, and the problems that have been faced this morning and exposed this morning are going to be submerged through other activities, and they're not going to be met. If it were possible for you to have fellowship with other Christians in the days of the week or the afternoon hours, so that you could honestly and openly just frankly face your need, possibly in that smaller fellowship of united prayer, there could be some solution. The apostles were twelve.

They met together. What are we going to do about this problem among the widows? An answer was presented. They presented it to, received it as from the Lord, and presented it to the people.

Will the people respond to it? Well, the solution had to be faced on this basis. You see, they didn't understand that they were going to have such a big dining room, that the church was going to be so concerned about food. They preached Christ, but they recognized they weren't dealing with souls.

Perhaps one of the great errors of our present-day evangelism is that we haven't wanted to get involved with people, and we've been trying to win souls, as though souls were kind of an expressance of personality. The Indians, you know, on the western plains used to take scalps, and they could put these scalps on a scalp pole and dance around the fire. And when you say, where are the people that wore the scalps? Well, they're out there, bones bleaching in the desert somewhere.

And I'm afraid too many times our evangelism has been in terms of souls, something apart from the person. It's very difficult to become involved with people, and they had. And the apostles, of course, being responsible, had assumed all of the duties.

At first it was possible for them to carry it. But something happened. As they took this task and that, and accepted this responsibility and that on behalf of the group, they were not able to do the thing God had set them apart to do.

And thus the failure really was to point out the fact that there was something amiss in the relationship that the apostles had to the entire group. And in the second verse, you read their statement, it is not reasonable. It's utterly foolish.

It's beyond the point of reason that we should leave the word of God and serve tables. They'd done it, I'm sure. They had administered by the accident of development.

But they look at what they're doing and they say we can't keep up with these problems. We aren't able to take care of the difficulties. What are we going to do? It's too much for us.

Is God calling us now to become administrators of the benevolence of the congregation? Is it our responsibility to solve all these difficulties? And so they said the first thing God showed them was this. It wasn't reasonable that those that had been given by the church for the purpose of ministering the word should leave the word to minister to tables. That was the first thing.

They had to recognize responsibility. Then they said if God wants us to do this, if God has set us apart to do this, there must be others that he wants to take the task we cannot carry. So the word came from the apostles to the multitude of disciples, look you out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

He said to the people you know, those among you that are of honest report, whose lives are above reproach, men that are full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom. Now what are, to whom do these qualifications apply? You'd say oh it must be to the apostles. Look at that, of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and of wisdom.

No, these are the deacons. These are the deacons in the congregation. No man should be a deacon according to the scripture unless his life is above reproach, unless he is full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, being practical prudence and common sense on the one hand, and I would think the gift of wisdom on the other.

These are the biblical qualifications for the office of a deacon. You see, every office in the church, every ministry in the church, all function in the church, presupposes that they've been filled with the Holy Spirit. This is true, full of the Holy Ghost, but of honest report and full of wisdom.

So there was a basic minimum qualification, full of the Spirit of God, and then these other practical matters which would indicate that they would be able, since they could administer their own households well, they would be able also to administer the responsibilities of the church. Look you out among you. Decide who among you are qualified for this task.

Present them to us, and we will appoint them for the task. This was God's solution. Every responsibility in the fellowship had in the plan of God a person.

God's plan is always a person. When God wanted to establish a ministry in China, he found a person in Hudson Taylor. When he wished to reach India, his plan was a person in William Carey.

God's method is a man. Invariably, when I say man, I'm not excluding women, I'm using the term generically. God's answer to the need is a human being, a person.

A person whose life is committed to him, a person filled with him, and a person who's prepared to accept the responsibilities that the task impose. Now obviously, these men would have had other plans. There is no question in my mind of what they were busy men.

They had responsibilities. They were working. They made their own living, undoubtedly.

They all had their tasks. And they were men that would have to accept this as being from God, and commit themselves to it, adjusting their lives to fulfill this responsibility. This is exactly the manner in which God proposes to work today.

Every ministry, whether it be in missions at home or abroad in the church, depends upon a person, some person, and others as well, for this is a multiplied ministry. But I will go further and say this, that in the plan and economy of God, every member of the body of Christ, everyone in the fellowship, has a task that's been given by the Lord. The idea that a few do the work for the many is Roman and not biblical.

The biblical idea is given in 1 Corinthians 12, where we are told, the Spirit of God divides gifts severally to every man as he wills. First, he gives gifts to men. He divides severally to every man.

There is equipment in the provision of God's grace for you. Now, he will not give all the nine gifts of the Spirit to you, I am sure, nor to me, because he wants us to be mutually dependent upon others. But God will give you that supernatural equipment and enabling that you need for the task that he has for you.

If you are prepared to meet him on his terms, namely that of full surrender to his will and appropriation of his presence, God will give you some gift, some ability, some ministry that is essential for the church, and without it there will be as much a gap in what is being done as a gear with teeth missing. There will be a grinding and a breakdown. It is imperative, therefore, that you realize your importance.

If you are in Christ and part of a fellowship, there is spiritual equipment that God has for you. No one just goes along for the ride in the Christian life. No one is just there to occupy space.

You must recognize this. This is why the scripture says, but covet earnestly the best gifts. Recognize that God has for you, and that gift is best which is his will for you.

And Paul said to Timothy, stir up the gift that is in you by the laying on of my hands. I do not believe the gift came because Paul laid his hands on him, but I believe that by this act of consecration and ordination and dedication, it was stated by the Lord through Paul, the gifts that Timothy had to be used in behalf of the church. And there is some ministry God has for you.

And there is not only equipment, but there is task. A careful reading of Romans 12 will reveal to you that there are many ministries. There is the gift of ministry of helps and of administrations and of exhortation and of giving and of teaching.

Every member of the body of Christ is to have a ministry. We see it here when the apostle's hands are tied by the perplexity of the problem. It carries us back in the Old Testament to the time that Moses' father-in-law, Jethro, saw this man trying to settle all the problems in that great people, two and a half million people.

And he said to his son-in-law, to Moses, you can't do this. It's utterly impossible for one man to serve all the multitudinous needs. Look you out among you men that can hear complaints and can make decisions, wise men in good.

And it is therefore extended into the church. When the apostles find themselves incapable of dealing with the multitudinous responsibilities and details, then look among you for servants, for that's what the word deacon means. But we mustn't stop there.

In Ephesians chapter 4, he says he gave some to be apostles and some prophets and some evangelists and pastors and teachers for the perfecting of the saints into the work of the ministry. And we've stated in the past, the work of the ministry is to be done by the saints. The fellowship in service is this.

Every member of the fellowship has a responsibility, just as for every member of the fellowship there is spiritual provision. And it behooves us to recognize this. Now part of the problem of 20th century Christianity is this, that we are following Rome more diligently than we are following the word of God.

We are in mortal conflict with an international conspiracy known as communism, and I related to you the first of the year, what I repeat now just briefly, how that in Minneapolis in 1935, I talked to the director of the Communist Workers Training School, the school being located directly opposite the front doors of the First Baptist Church. I asked him some 20 more questions concerning their methods, and he answered very candidly. Then he pointed to me and said, pointed to my brief bag on the floor, and he said, do you have a Bible in there? I said, yes.

He said, do you read it? I said, yes. He said, do you believe it? And I said, yes. Then he said, why have you wasted my time? I said, what do you mean? He said, when we found out that a small group of people without educated leadership, without political influence, and without wealth, were able to conquer their generation in their world in two generations, and they'd left an exact record as the means they'd used to do it, we studied that book.

He said, I presume that in some respects I know the Bible better than you do. Every principle I teach is either taken from the Bible or related to it. He said, the difference between us and you is this.

We reject the theology of the Bible as mere superstition, but we accept the practicality of the Bible, its methodology, its principles, its policies of operation. And he said, with these, what you've rejected we will use to wipe you off the face of the earth. That was in 1935 or 6, and now we're down into 1962, and we're appalled at the progress that's been made in these years.

But it's to be understood that this is the case. There's a discipline, every member of the party has responsibilities amenable to those above him, and the work depends upon tried and trusted individuals. Look you out among you men you can trust, look you out among you men that are full of the Holy Ghost, look out among you men that have wisdom, and realize that the extension of this work is going to come by the multiplying of the hands doing it.

It's not going to be in the apostles, it's not going to be one-man ministry, but it's going to be every member of the fellowship finding his place under the headship of Christ and fulfilling that place. We understand of course that it's much easier to aggrandize a man, to glorify a man, and to build a work around a man, but the unfortunate part of it is that this has been done in the Christian church for through two or three hundred years, and as soon as the man is gone the work evaporates. What God is looking for in the 20th

century is not so much great men that can build great monuments like inverted pyramids that rest upon their shoulders, but a return to the biblical principle of the significance of every individual.

And it is my firm conviction that if we are to be blessable to the degree to which God is waiting and willing to bless us, it's when you, as a member of this fellowship or whatever fellowship you may be part of elsewhere, recognize your responsibility. First, to have or maintain a relationship with the Lord described here as full of the Holy Ghost, to maintain a relationship with the world described here as of good rapport, and to maintain a relationship with practical common sense called wisdom. And then, having done this, to so present yourself to the Lord Jesus that you can work in conjunction with and in cooperation with the fellowship, the body, and each compliment the other and each recognize the utter dependence upon the other, and work together in harmony.

The very contrast to what you had here was a personality division and strife that broke the fellowship and caused it to lose the blessing of God, is to be utterly refuted by us, absolutely repudiated by us, and we are to then realize that God's used the problem to point out a principle. And the principle was that everyone had a place to fill and a responsibility to carry. It isn't given to us in its fullest extension here, but it is given to us throughout the Word, that every member of the body of Christ fulfills a function just as your finger, your tongue, your ears, your feet, each have place and function in the body.

No member more honorable than the other, and when one suffers the body itself is in pain. And when we come to that concept and you are prepared to realize that you will not know your place in the body until you're filled with the Spirit, you cannot take your place in the body until you're filled with the Spirit, until the cross has come in and cut right through all other aspirations, all other purposes, all other desires, and you remain amenable to the head as submissive to him as your hand is to your head, then the body itself can be blessed. Now we will discover from the latter part of this chapter that out of seven deacons there was one that God was pleased to use in a special way.

I am confident that the ones who rejoiced the most in this were the apostles and the other six of the deacons. I can't for a moment imagine that there was such a thing as jealousy or criticism, that God should have been pleased to have taken Stephen and so worked on his heart that he could be said to be a man full of faith. It was not necessarily true that the others did not have faith, but here is a man full of faith.

You may be that man, but should you be that man you will be the first to recognize others who may have greater gift and liberty and anointing that you have in this regard. He was a man not only full of faith, but he was a man full of the Holy Ghost, a deacon not worthy or not chosen to be among the apostles, but one who was among the deacons. And we find here that this man Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

I am confident again, I say, that the whole company rejoiced that God was pleased to use Stephen. Now why he didn't take Philip or why he didn't take Timon or Nicanor, I don't know, but he chose Stephen and Stephen was equipped for the task. But I know if I understand the text correctly that these others rejoiced that here was one that God was using.

I'm sure they supported him with prayer. I'm sure they stood by him with joy because they had now learned that God was not restricting his ministry to the apostles. In the previous chapter they put their sick out so that Peter's shadow might fall on the sick and they might be healed.

Now it is Stephen and God is saying that the privilege of service is in direct proportion to your obedience, your submission to your faith, and that you where you are have the privilege of being everything God would make anyone. How strange it should be that some should say, well I didn't have the privilege of college education, or I didn't have the privilege of Bible school education, or I was saved late in life, or I'm a layman, or any other excuse. My friend, you are just as holy as you want to be today.

You are just as spiritual as you want to be, and you are just as useful as you want to be. There is no limit to your spirituality imposed because of your station, your nation, or your rank. There is no limitation at all.

Anything that God has done for anyone he's prepared to do for you. God has no stepchildren. He's quite willing to meet you and satisfy your heart, equip you, and use you.

For with this text before us we have eliminated once and for all all sacred hierarchy in the fellowship, and we have opened the door saying that the least among us may be the greatest in terms of God's willingness to use them. Little Sophie, the best remembered person in this fellowship for years and years and years, whose testimony encircled the globe, was a washerwoman by the name of Sophie that loved the Lord Jesus Christ supremely, and was prepared to bring to him all that he'd given to her in utter abandonment to him. So what we find is this.

There's a fellowship in service. You are needed. You are important.

God's work will fang or fall in the local assembly upon your obedience. Your being disgruntled and your murmuring and complaining can be the reason why everything has to stop. But on the same token, your abandonment and your submission and your yieldedness can turn you into a vessel and an instrument that can be used in unmeasured manner to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Oh, the wonderful privilege of being part of the body of Christ and part of a local body of believers. Fellowship in service, what is this? A complete abandonment to the head that as members one of another, we recognize the right of the head to use each member in the way, the manner, the place, and the degree that he desires. Oh, that God might give to us understanding of what it is to have sharing, to have participation, to have koinonia, to have fellowship in service.

As we come now to the table of the Lord, can it be that you are saying as you take the bread and as you lift the cup that the whole purpose of my heart this morning is to let the cross go through all ambitions and plans and I want only God's will for my life. If this could be the purpose of our hearts expressed as we come to the table of the Lord, here to take of the emblems of his death, his poured out life, his given body, then you're preparing yourself spiritually to find your place in the body of Christ. Shall we bow our hearts together in prayer? Our Father, we thank and praise thee that thou hast given us principles, explicit, clear, simple principles.

We know that problems are allowed of thee because they will drive us, be the means, the wedge, the lever to drive us into principles. We know that the solution always is to fulfill the mind and will of Christ. We know, our Father, that thou hast place and purpose for every life.

And so we would ask thee that from what we've learned today, there might come a new submission, a new abandonment, a new surrender to our hearts. As we tell the head of the church, our Lord Jesus, that we're prepared to be what he wants us to be. If there be those among us, Lord, that are to fulfill ministry as elders and as deacons, some as teachers, each in our place, each with our ministry, some with the gift of

helps and ministrations and exhortation, help us to find our place and fill it, filled with thy spirit, equipped to serve thee.

Bind our hearts now into this unity of fellowship and service. For Jesus' sake, amen.

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