

THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

Scripture Reading: 1 John 1:2-3, 5-7, 9; 1 Cor. 10:16; 2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1; John 15:4-5; Philem. 6

OUTLINE

- I. The meaning of the fellowship of life:
 - A. Sharing in common—1 Cor. 10:16; Philem. 6.
 - B. The flowing of the divine life within us—1 John 1:2-3, 6-7:
 1. Vertically between the Father, the Son, and us—v. 6.
 2. Horizontally between us, with one another—v. 7.
- II. The source of the fellowship of life—the eternal life of God—1 John 1:2-3.
- III. The means of the fellowship of life—the Holy Spirit—2 Cor. 13:14.
- IV. The location of the fellowship of life—our spirit—Phil. 2:1.
- V. The function of the fellowship of life—supplying us with all the riches of the divine life—John 15:4-5.
- VI. The issue of the fellowship of life:
 - A. Bringing light to us—1 John 1:5-7.
 - B. Bringing the practical cleansing of the blood to us—1 John 1:7.
 - C. Keeping us abiding in the Lord—John 15:4-5.
- VII. The relationship between the fellowship of life and the sense of life:
 - A. The fellowship of life being realized by the sense of life.
 - B. The sense of life preserving the fellowship of life.
- VIII. The breaking of the fellowship of life:
 - A. By sins.
 - B. By disobedience.
 - C. By not caring for the sense of life.
 - D. By not following the inner anointing—1 John 2:27.
- IX. The restoration of the fellowship of life:
 - A. By the confessing of our sins—1 John 1:9.
 - B. By the cleansing of the blood.

Focus: The fellowship of life, being the flowing of the divine life, comes from the life of God and is preserved by the sense of life to supply us with the riches of the divine life.

In this lesson we want to see something concerning the fellowship of life. The King James Version renders the word fellowship as communion. Communion is a good translation, but its true meaning has been somewhat spoiled by traditional thought and usage.

In Philippians 2:1 the apostle Paul speaks of the fellowship of spirit. A number of translators consider that the spirit mentioned here is the Spirit of God. But actually this is not the Spirit of God but our spirit. We know this because it is mentioned in the context of a list of our spiritual virtues. In Philippians 2:1 Paul speaks of encouragement in Christ, consolation of love, fellowship of spirit, and tenderheartedness and compassions. These are not the virtues of God but our spiritual virtues, so the spirit here must be our spirit. We have to make this point clear to the saints. This is very important because this verse tells us that the fellowship of life is going on in our spirit. Our spirit is the location of today's fellowship which we have with the Lord and with the saints.

In John 15:4-5 the word fellowship is not mentioned, but we know that these verses in fact refer to the fellowship. In these two verses the word used to indicate fellowship is abide. The Lord said, "Abide in Me and I in you." This mutual abiding actually is the fellowship.

I. THE MEANING OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

A. Sharing in Common

In Greek the word for fellowship means sharing in common. First Corinthians 10:16 says, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the fellowship of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the fellowship of the body of Christ?" We share the Lord's Body in common, and we share the cup in common, so the Body and the cup become our fellowship. In Philemon 6 Paul speaks of "the fellowship of your faith." Philemon had a faith and with that faith there was a kind of sharing in common.

B. The Flowing of the Divine Life within Us

The fellowship of life is the flowing of the divine life within us (1 John 1:2-3, 6-7). We can illustrate this with two things. First, the circulation of the blood is a very good illustration of the flowing of life. The blood within our physical body flows, circulates, all the time, and this circulating, or this flowing, is a good picture of the spiritual fellowship of life, the flowing of the divine life. Another illustration that can be used is the current of electricity. The current of electricity is the moving of electricity. In like manner, the fellowship of life is the moving, the flowing, of the divine life within us. We all know the blood circulation needs the vessels of our body and the electrical current needs the wires. We are like the vessels and the wires for the spiritual flow of the divine life.

1. Vertically between the Father, the Son, and Us

The flowing of the divine life within us first is vertical between the Father, the Son, and us (1 John 1:6, 3).

2. Horizontally between Us, with One Another

The flowing of the divine life, the fellowship of life, is also horizontally between us, with one another (1 John 1:7). The horizontal aspect depends upon the vertical aspect. First John 1 says that we first have fellowship with the Father and the Son; then we have this fellowship with one another. If our fellowship is wrong vertically with the Father and the Son, we cannot have the fellowship horizontally with one another. The fellowship between us horizontally depends upon our fellowship with the Father and the Son vertically.

This vertical and horizontal fellowship is like the weaving of a textile. In this vertical and horizontal fellowship, there is the mingling of the Triune God—the Father, the Son, and the Spirit—with all the saints. Actually, the proper fellowship is the mingling of the Triune God with all the redeemed saints. In other words, the fellowship eventually consummates in the oneness of the Triune God with the Body of Christ. This fellowship is the flow of the life of the Triune God within us.

II. THE SOURCE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE — THE ETERNAL LIFE OF GOD

The source of the fellowship of life is the eternal life of God. First John 1:2-3 says that the eternal life has been reported to us that we may have fellowship. This word proves that the fellowship comes out of the eternal life. The eternal life is the source of this fellowship. Just as the electrical current comes out of the power plant, the fellowship comes out of the eternal life.

Many in Christianity think that fellowship is a kind of social contact in a social association with social activities. But fellowship is not a kind of social contact. We have to reject that. We do not want that. The real and genuine fellowship among us originates in the eternal, divine life. If the source is wrong, that is not the genuine fellowship.

III. THE MEANS OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE— THE HOLY SPIRIT

The means by which the fellowship of life is carried out is the Holy Spirit, so it is called the fellowship of the Holy Spirit in 2 Corinthians 13:14. The Holy Spirit is the instrument, the means, that carries out this fellowship. Actually, it is really hard for us in our experience to differentiate these three things: the fellowship, the life, and the Spirit. These three things are one. The life is the source, the fellowship is the flow, and the Spirit is the carrier, the means. In our experience we cannot differentiate them, but in our explanation of the truth we can.

IV. THE LOCATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE—OUR SPIRIT

Our spirit is the location of the fellowship of life. This is based upon Philippians 2:1. We have to point out as clearly and strongly as possible that if our contact with one another is not in the spirit, right away it becomes a social thing. Our contact must be in the spirit. Then our contact becomes the fellowship. This is because the flowing of the divine life is altogether not in our soul, our natural life. It is altogether in our spirit.

The fellowship of life is carried out by God's Spirit in our spirit. Our mind may apprehend the fellowship, but it is not in our mind. Our emotions may be happy about it, but the fellowship of life is not in our emotion. It is altogether in our spirit. So if we are apart from our spirit or outside of our spirit, right away our contact with one another becomes a kind of social association that is no longer the fellowship of life. The fellowship of life must be in our spirit.

V. THE FUNCTION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE— SUPPLYING US WITH ALL THE RICHES OF THE DIVINE LIFE

If the fellowship of life did not have a function, it would be meaningless. The function of the fellowship of life is to supply us with all the riches of the divine life (John 15:4-5). The more the divine life flows within us the more supply of life it carries to us. A good picture of this is the flowing of the river of the water of life in the New Jerusalem (Rev. 22:1-2). In that river is the tree of life. The tree of life indicates the supply that goes along with the flowing of the river of water of life, which is the fellowship of life. Thus, the tree of life going along with the river indicates the function of the flowing of the river of life. This function is to supply us with the riches of the divine life.

John 15:4-5 says that we abide in the vine and then the vine abides in us. This abiding supplies us with the life-juice of the vine. We know this because our abiding eventually issues in fruit-bearing. The fruit-bearing proves that the abiding supplies us with the rich life of the vine tree. The fellowship of life functions in this unique thing—to supply us with the riches of the life of Christ.

VI. THE ISSUE OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

A. Bringing Light to Us

The first issue of the fellowship of life is that it brings light to us (1 John 1:5-7). God is light, and if we have fellowship with Him, we are in the light.

B. Bringing the Practical Cleansing of the Blood to Us

The fellowship of life not only brings light to us but also brings the practical cleansing of the blood to us. The blood's cleansing might be a mere doctrine and an objective fact to us. It may be there doctrinally as a fact, but it has nothing to do with us until we are really in the fellowship. First John 1:7 says that when we are in the light, we have fellowship and the blood cleanses us. If we are not in the fellowship, we may say that we apply the blood and we may believe the blood cleanses us, but actually the cleansing is not there. The blood actually cleanses us and is applied to us when we are really in the fellowship. This point is quite crucial.

Many Christians believe the blood cleanses them but this cleansing is not practically applied to them because they are not in the fellowship. The blood does not practically cleanse us outside of the fellowship. We must be in the fellowship. There is only one unique verse in the whole Bible which tells us how the cleansing can be practical. That verse is 1 John 1:7. It says that when we are in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus cleanses us from all sin.

C. Keeping Us Abiding in the Lord

The issue of the fellowship is that it keeps us abiding in the Lord (John 15:4-5). Actually, the abiding is the fellowship, and the fellowship is the abiding.

VII. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE AND THE SENSE OF LIFE

A. The Fellowship of Life Being Realized by the Sense of Life

If we do not have the sense of life, we cannot realize the fellowship of life. The fellowship of life is known, sensed, realized, by the sense of life. How can we know that we have the fellowship of life, the flow of the divine life, within us? It is by the sense of life. We can illustrate this with our physical body. When our physical body has no illness, no problem, we do not have any feeling, but when we are ill, we are full of feeling. When we feel something in our stomach, this means we have stomach trouble. When we do not feel anything, this means our stomach is okay. It is the same with the fellowship of life.

Usually, when we have the fellowship of life, we do not feel that much, but when there is something wrong with the fellowship of life, the flowing of the divine life, we sense it. If we are walking in the light, in the fellowship of life, we do not have any special sensation. When we have any negative and abnormal sensation, that proves we have the fellowship of life, but it also proves that something is wrong with the fellowship of life. Thus, the fellowship of life is realized by the sense of life.

B. The Sense of Life Preserving the Fellowship of Life

The fellowship of life is preserved, safeguarded, protected, by the sense of life. Even with our physical body it is the same. Our feelings of pain or discomfort are a protection and a safeguard to us. Thus, to realize the fellowship of life and to safeguard, keep, and preserve the fellowship of life are all by the sense of life.

VIII. THE BREAKING OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

Our relationship of life with the Father can never be broken but the fellowship can be broken. The breaking of the fellowship of life is like the breaking of the electrical current. Even a small thing can cut off the electricity, and this breaks the electrical current.

A. By Sins

The breaking of the fellowship of life is first by sins. If we do something which we know is sinful, this breaks, cuts off, the fellowship of life.

B. By Disobedience

If we disobey God, this surely cuts off the fellowship of life.

C. By Not Caring for the Sense of Life

We must care for the sense of life. If we do not care for it, this will break the fellowship of life.

D. By Not Following the Inner Anointing

The main things that generally cut off the fellowship of life are sins, disobedience, not caring for the sense of life, and not following the inner anointing. First John 2:27 says clearly that we have to abide in the Lord according to the teaching of the anointing.

X. THE RESTORATION OF THE FELLOWSHIP OF LIFE

After the fellowship of life is broken, we have to restore it.

A. By the Confessing of Our Sins

We have to confess our sins. First John 1:9 says that if we confess our sins, God is faithful and righteous to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. He forgives us according to His word faithfully and also according to the redemptive work of Christ righteously. Thus, by confessing our sins, our broken fellowship of life can surely be restored.

B. By the Cleansing of the Blood

The confessing is on our side, and the cleansing is on God's side. If we confess, surely the blood cleanses us and the broken fellowship is always restored.

The focus of this message is as follows: the fellowship of life, being the flowing of the divine life, comes from the life of God and is preserved by the sense of life to supply us with the riches of the divine life.

Reference: Living Stream Ministry Publications