

Fellowship with Others

The formation of family is central to God's intent in creation. When God created the heavens he created spiritual beings to share it with. When God created the earth he did the same. Then he gave free will to those he created so that both his heavenly family and earthly family would be built on love and choice; nothing was forced. The first two chapters of the Bible begin with the joining of Adam and Eve as man and wife and the last chapter of the Bible ends with a wedding between the church as the bride and Christ. This wedding expresses a perfect relational unity between the millions of believers and Christ as the eternal age begins.

When you became a believer you became part of those millions of believers that make up the people or family of God. He established your new identity by sending the Holy Spirit to live in you. His Spirit in you becomes a seal of ownership. After Jesus's resurrection and before Jesus returned to heaven he gave his disciples the task of increasing his family from every tribe, tongue and nation. When this job has been completed, Jesus will come again.

I (Pete) often like to be by myself. Perhaps this has something to do with the fact that my family was not a strong or close unit and being on my own was a means of escape. Family is not always a positive environment and church environments are not always positive environments. But a church environment that has understood the ways of God and the importance of family is precious and powerful. This next verse expresses this...

Psalms 133:1-3 *'Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, running down on the beard, the beard of Aaron, running down on the edge of his garments. It is like the dew of Mount Hermon descending upon the mountains of Zion; for there the LORD commanded the blessing - life forevermore.'*

Here the psalmist describes the land of Israel where rain doesn't normally fall between May and October. During these months the morning dew is essential for providing moisture for the crops in the summer season. Mount Hermon is in the north of Israel and receives significant amounts of dew because of its proximity to the Mediterranean. The heavy dew along with the melting snow creates springs at the base of the mountain that are vital for the maturing of the surrounding crops. The psalmist is using this illustration to outline that in the same way water is essential for good plant growth, so unity among believers brings the blessing of God.

The psalmist does not mean that when believers gather together that it is automatically good and pleasant. The important ingredient needed is unity. The following verse helps us understand the type of unity that transforms the meeting of believers into something good and pleasant.

Matthew 18:19-20

'Again I say to you that if two of you agree on earth concerning anything that they ask, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there in the midst of them'

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In order to understand the significance in this verse it is helpful to understand the meaning of the following words:-

Agree: The Greek word for agree means 'symphony'; the harmonisation of sounds.

Gathering in His name: According to Hebrew thought, a person's name is inseparable from the person to whom it belongs. God's name reflects his character, his will and his ways. We gather in his name; not our own name or agenda.

In the midst of them –God is spiritually present when we meet in his name.

This tells us that when two or more believers' hearts are harmonised with the heart of Jesus, he is spiritually present in their midst. In response to their requests, the Father will release from heaven whatever they ask. This is an incredible promise. It is the promise that heaven's power and resources are made available to believers on earth.

Clearly the fellowship of believers has great significance. The following verse describes the activities of believers that were vital in building that unity.

Acts 2:42

'...and they continued steadfastly (devoted) in the apostles teaching and fellowship in the breaking of bread and in prayers'

The New Testament church met together around the 'breaking of bread,' (also called 'communion') and the teaching of the God's word and prayer. The word '*steadfastly*' suggests a relational commitment to one another even through difficulties as this next verse seems to indicate.

Acts 2:44

'Now all who believed were together and had all things in common and sold possessions and goods and divided them among all, as anyone had need'

The foundation of their unity was based on the Lordship of Christ. Their devotion for one another grew from this foundation. These next two verses outline the fruit of such unity.

Acts 2:43

'Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles.'

Acts 2:46-47

'Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favour of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.'

The fruit of their unity meant they all had all they needed; everyone was filled with awe (or great respect for God); many wonders and signs happened; they had glad and sincere hearts; they enjoyed the favour of people around them and every day more were being saved and added to their number. No wonder they were devoted to one another to God's word and prayer!

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Understanding Unity

The New Testament book of **Ephesians chapter 4** focuses on the unity of believers, especially the following three passages. The first passage tells us that this unity is a result of the work of the Holy Spirit. In other words, it is not a unity that needs to be created. Unity between believers is a fruit of our individual fellowship with God through his Spirit.

*'I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, ² with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, ³ **endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.***

However the development of unity between individual believers into a strong corporate group also requires leadership building skills. A group of individual football players does not automatically make a team. Leadership skills are needed to transform the individual players into a united team. For this purpose God gives skills or abilities. The next verse explains this.

*¹¹ And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, ¹² **for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, ¹³ till we all come to the unity of the faith** and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; ¹⁴ that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, ¹⁵ but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ— ¹⁶ from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.*

The last passage is an appeal to each believer to recognise their own need for change so that they do not to give the devil any opportunity to bring disruption and therefore grieve or restrict the Holy Spirit from bringing maturity into the corporate fellowship that we call the church.

*²⁵ Therefore, putting away lying, "**Let each one of you speak truth with his neighbour,**" for we are members of one another. ²⁶ "Be angry, and do not sin" do not let the sun go down on your wrath, ²⁷ **nor give place to the devil.** ²⁸ Let him who stole steal no longer, but rather let him labour, working with his hands what is good, that he may have something to give him who has need. ²⁹ Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers. ³⁰ And **do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God**, by whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. ³¹ Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamour, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. ³² And be kind to one another, tender hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.'*

Modern culture is 'I'-centred, consumer-driven and full of a sense of entitlement... as you devote yourself to the Lord, he will turn you outward and this is expressed through your attitude and heart to bless and be a blessing in his family. He will also turn you outward to those you meet in daily life who don't yet know him. Love is commitment not a feeling. As

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we have received God's love in our hearts so he wants to join us with other believers to express that love in all manner of ways. Being part of the family of God is God's corporate place for us to be sanctified, to be changed as we rub shoulders alongside other believers. Iron sharpens iron and we all need our edges challenged and knocked off. Being part of God's family is a place where we learn to love others that we wouldn't naturally get on with; a place where we learn to serve others and be generous; a place where we learn to handle and work through conflict in a healthy biblical way; a place where we can comfort, encourage and give and receive God's counsel; a place where we can develop our gifts to see his church grow and mature. We cannot and should not do this out of ourselves; we can only do this through the motivation of God's love.

1 Corinthians 12:27 says that we are the Body of Christ and individually members of it. None of us can say to another, '**I don't need you.**' We are not islands floating on the sea of humanity holding a pass into eternity and waiting for Jesus's return! We are his hands and feet and heart to share his love in a broken fallen world. Being part of God's family is about **being** his Body on the earth until he returns. **1 Corinthians chapters 12 & 13** give us more instruction of the dynamics of being the Body of Christ

At the beginning of this study it we said that family is central to God's intent for his creation. Following the second coming of Christ, when evil is removed, we will experience the fullness of what God has always been working for. We get a taste of it in this age but the fullness is something we can greatly look forward to.