

FELLOWSHIP & SHARING IN THE COMMUNITY OF BELIEVERS

The idea of a "common unity" between all those who belong to Jesus seems to be largely ignored, in these days. It may, at times, be acknowledged in the "theological" realm, but it is grossly neglected - or even opposed - in everyday life. Even the idea of "fellowship" - one of the expressions of this common unity - has become stripped of its original meaning - and now often implies nothing more than coming together for heavy eating and shallow conversation. But gluttony and frivolous speech are a far cry from the way of life that belongs to us - *and is required of us* - as children of the Most High God.

This study focuses on various dimensions of community, fellowship and sharing, as found in the New Testament. It focuses both on the facts, which are to influence our perspective on the way we should live, as well as on the commands, which are to influence our actions. (The context, as always, must be taken into consideration.)

This is what we must strive for, if we want to escape the shallow, superficial, institutionalized "Christianity," which surrounds us. It may look quite impressive to people, with all its programs and activities, but it makes God want to vomit. (Compare to Revelation 3:14-22.)

PART 1: FELLOWSHIP, COMMUNITY, SHARING...

A. With God

1. "God" or "the Father"

- 1 John 1:3 - Our *fellowship* is with the Father.
- 1 John 1 6-7 - If we claim to have *fellowship* with him, yet walk in darkness, we lie... / If we walk in the light as he is in the light, we have *fellowship* with each other (God / us)...

2. "Jesus Christ"

- 1 John 1:3 - Our *fellowship* is with... [the Father's] Son, Jesus Christ.
- 1 Corinthians 1:9 - God... called us into *fellowship* with his Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. [The word "Lord" means "Master."]

3. "The Body/Blood of Jesus Christ"

- 1 Corinthians 10:16 - The "cup of blessing" is a *participation/sharing* in the blood of Christ; the bread is a *participation/sharing* in the body of Christ.
- [Note the contrast to v. 18, 20, which mentions participation/sharing in a pagan altar and the demons represented by it.]

4. **"The Holy Spirit"**

- 2 Corinthians 13:14 - May... the *fellowship* of the Holy Spirit be with you all. [Note: This verse could be understood as saying either: 1) the Holy Spirit is the source of that fellowship, or 2) we are in close fellowship with him. Either interpretation would give us a true statement about people who belong to God.]
 - Philippians 2:1 - If you have any... *fellowship* with the Spirit... be one-minded (etc.).
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B. With God's Blessings, Character, etc.

1. ***Blessings of the Gospel ("Good News") and Salvation***

- Romans 11:17 - [Based on an analogy: the grafting of wild olive branches into a cultivated olive tree, even though it is contrary to their wild nature:] You Gentiles (non-Jews) were grafted into the tree (symbolizing Israel) & *share* in the nourishment that comes from the root (symbolizing the Jews' forefathers, to whom the promises were given). [= You get to share in the blessings, etc., that came as a result of the promises given by God, to the Jew's ancestors - even though these promises were not originally given to you.]
- Romans 15:27a - You Gentiles (non-Jews) have *shared* in the Jews' spiritual blessings. [second half of the verse: Therefore, you Gentiles (non-Jews) have an obligation to *share* with them (the needy Christian Jews) your physical blessings.]
- 1 Corinthians 9:23 - Paul: I do all things for all people... for the gospel's sake. [The gospel = the "good news" about salvation.] He did this so that, together, they could *share* in its (the gospel's) blessings. [Paul was willing to give-up any of his "rights" and privileges for the good of others.]

2. ***Grace (Undeserved Kindness)***

- Philippians 1:7 - You all *share* in God's grace with me.

3. ***Divine Nature (God's Moral Character)***

- 2 Peter 1:4 - Because of God's promises (see v. 3), these two things are now possible: 1) You can now *participate / share* in the divine nature [= You can have/develop his moral character in your life (which means, you can become "like Christ")] and... 2) You can escape the corruption in the world, which is caused by evil desires.

4. ***Glory***

- 1 Peter 5:1 - Peter witnessed Christ's sufferings in the past. [He also shared in them, in the sense of 1 Peter 4:13]. In the future, he will *share* in Christ's glory - a glory that will be someday be revealed (made known) to all.
 - [See 1 Peter 4:13 & other verses in the section about suffering & its blessings. Sharing in Christ's glory is made possible because of our willingness to also share in his sufferings.]
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C. With People - "Reciprocal" Sharing [the same type of sharing is expressed by each of those involved]

1. ***Individual People Doing Things Together (examples)***
 - Luke 5:10 - James and John - Simon's fishing *partners*.
 - 2 Corinthians 8:23 - Titus = Paul's *partner* and fellow-worker
 - Philippians 1:5 - They (Paul & the Christians at Philippi) were *partners* (in many ways) in spreading the good news about Jesus.

 2. ***The Expression of Love and Community... with other believers (a general statement and two examples)***
 - Acts 2:42 - All the believers... devoted themselves to... *fellowship*, etc.
 - Galatians 2:9 - The leaders (the apostles & others, in the church at Jerusalem) gave Paul and Barnabas the "right hand of *fellowship*." [They acknowledged them as partners.]
 - Philemon 1:17 - Paul to Philemon: If you consider me a *partner*, then welcome him (Philemon's runaway slave, Onesimus, who was returning to Philemon) the same way you would welcome me.

 3. ***The Expression of Love and Community... with those who are enduring trials/persecution***
 - Hebrews 10:33 - You were willing to *associate publicly* with (to *be a partner* with) those who were being insulted and persecuted.

 4. ***The Sharing of One's Faith with Other Christians***
 - Philemon 1:6 - I pray that you will be active in "living-out" the faith we *share*. [The focus here is not in "soul-winning" - which some people call "sharing the faith" - but in the day-to-day expression of one's faith, within the community of believers. It is connected with the love we must have for God's people - that is, for our spiritual brothers and sisters.]

 5. ***Telling Others About Jesus, So That They Also Can Have a Part in Our Fellowship***
 - 1 John 1:3 - We proclaim the things we have seen and heard so that you also may have *fellowship* with us (also with the Father and the Son).

 6. ***COMMENT:*** Note that few, if any, of these verses focus on the mutual sharing of *material possessions*. This does not imply that such sharing is wrong, but it does show that there are *many other* things to share, besides mere physical objects! (Most instances of "sharing" of possessions will be found in the next section.)
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D. With People - "Directional" Sharing [the sharing is initiated by one person and received by another]

1. *With Those in Need (Sharing Material Possessions With Them)*

- Romans 12:13 - *Share* with the believers who are in need.
- Romans 15:26 - The Christians in Macedonia & Achaia were pleased to *make a contribution* to (= to *share with*) the poverty-stricken believers who lived in Jerusalem. [See also v. 27, which reminds us that we non-Jews are sharing in the spiritual blessings that belong to the Jews.]
- 2 Corinthians 8:4 - The Macedonian Christians pleaded for the privilege of *sharing* in this expression of serving/helping the Jewish believers.
- 2 Corinthians 9:13 - Many people will praise God because of your generosity in *sharing* with the Jews (and with others).
- Philippians 4:15 - You were the only group of Christians who *shared* with me, as far as "giving and receiving" were concerned. [Paul shared spiritual blessings with them, which they received; in return, they provided for Paul's physical needs - physical blessings which Paul received. See also v. 14 - they also shared in his troubles.]
- 1 Timothy 6:18 - Command the rich to be generous and willing to *share* (and also to do good things, etc.).
- Hebrews 13:16 - Don't forget to do good things & to *share* with others: God is pleased with these types of "sacrifices."

2. *The Sharing Between a Learner and a Teacher; the Sharing of Material and Spiritual Blessings/Possessions*

- Galatians 6:6 - Those who are taught/instructed about the Word should share "all good things" with their teachers.
- Philippians 4:15 - You were the only group of Christians who *shared* with me, as far as "giving and receiving" were concerned. [(See also the previous section.) The Philippians helped Paul by sharing their material possessions with him; Paul helped them by sharing spiritual blessings/possessions with them.]
- NOTE: Each of them - the teacher and the learner - are involved in "directional" sharing, each sharing with the other something that the other has need of. The Galatians 6:6 passage doesn't necessarily imply the sharing of material possessions (though it doesn't exclude them, either). However, the Philippians 4:15 passage *does* imply the sharing of material blessings/possessions (as well as the sharing of spiritual blessings/possessions).

3. *The Sharing of Formerly Unrevealed Truths about God's Salvation to the Gentiles (non-Jews)*

- Ephesians 3:9 [KJV manuscripts] - Concerning the "mystery" about how Gentiles could inherit the promise of salvation (through Jesus Christ): [MOST TRANSLATIONS] - Paul helped people understand by "explaining" it; [KJV] - Paul helped people understand how the Gentiles could "*share*" in these matters. [Both translation groups communicate approximately the same message, but in slightly different ways.]

E. With Suffering, as Well as with the Blessings That Go along with this Suffering: Patience, Encouragement, Glory, etc.

1. 2 Corinthians 1:7 - You have *shared* in our sufferings... you will also [share] in our comfort/encouragement.
2. Philippians 3:10 - I want to know Christ and... what it means to *share* in his sufferings... so that I may also "attain" the resurrection from the dead. [Those who share in Christ's sufferings will also share in his resurrection, and all it encompasses. (See 1 Peter 4:13, below.) Paul can attain the resurrection only because of his association/connection with Christ.]
3. Philippians 4:14 - It was good for you to *share* in my troubles (emphasis probably on Paul's needs). [See also v. 15, which mentions other dimensions of this sharing.]
4. 1 Peter 4:13 - (About painful trials...) Rejoice that you *share* in the sufferings of Christ. When his glory is revealed, you will be filled with joy (in contrast to their present situation). [They will receive blessings, glory, etc. At the present, they may experience pain, but the time will come that they will experience joy - and this joy will last forever.]
5. Revelation 1:9 - John - your brother and *sharer / companion* in: 1) the suffering, 2) the kingdom, and 3) the patient endurance - all three of which are ours because we are in Jesus.
6. Hebrews 10:33 - They not only endured suffering, but they were willing to *associate/be a partner* with others who were also suffering.
7. **SOMETHING TO CONSIDER:** Many people want the blessings... but they're not willing to accept the suffering that comes first!

F. A Few Misc. Passages

1. **Participation/Sharing in What an Alter Symbolizes (if you sacrifice at that altar)**
 - o 1 Corinthians 10:18 - People who eat the sacrifices *participate/share* in what the altar symbolizes. [Focus: the incompatibility of sharing in the Lord's body/blood (v. 16) and (at the same time) having *fellowship* with the demons represented by a pagan altar. You can't have a part in/with both!]
 2. **Participation in Humanity - Jesus Willing to "Share" Human Nature with the Rest of us**
 - o Hebrews 2:14 - Since God's children have flesh/blood, Jesus was also willing to *share* in their humanity (so he could conquer the devil & free us from death).
 3. **Partnership in the Gospel (Good News)**
 - o Philippians 1:5 - They were *partners* (in many ways) in spreading the good news about Jesus. So whenever Paul prayed for them, he prayed with joy.
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G. Things to AVOID having Fellowship/Partnership With...

1. **Note:** In some of these verses, a direct prohibition against the activity will not be found. Instead, the context shows that it is wrong.
2. **Sins**
 - 1 Timothy 5:22 - Don't *share* in other people's sins
 - Revelation 18:4 - [Regarding the "Babylon" of prophecy] Come out of Babylon, my people, so you won't *share/participate* in her sins (and experience her punishment of plagues).
3. **Darkness and its Fruits (spiritual darkness)**
 - 2 Corinthians 6:14 - What *fellowship* does light have with darkness?
 - Ephesians 5:11 - Have nothing to do with [don't *share/participate* in] the "fruitless" (worthless) deeds of darkness. Instead, expose them for what they are!
4. **The Wicked Work of Apostates (people who have departed from the faith)**
 - 2 John 1:11 - Anyone who welcomes a deceiver/antichrist *shares* in his evil/wicked work/activities. [Don't welcome him!]
5. **Killing People who are Righteous (example: killing the Prophets)**
 - Matthew 23:30 - The hypocritical boast of the religious leaders/teachers: "If we had lived in the days of our ancestors, we wouldn't have *helped* them [*participated* with them] in killing the prophets!" [Actually, they were just like their ancestors, and they were about to do something even worse than them, by killing Jesus!]
6. **Demons**
 - 1 Corinthians 10:20 - I don't want you to be *partners* with demons. [See v. 18; also the contrast to sharing in the blood/body of Christ - v. 16.]

PART 2: SOME OF THE THINGS WE HAVE IN COMMON

A. Preliminary notes:

1. The Bible uses the idea of "common" in two ways. In a "positive" sense, the Bible describes the early Christians as having many things in *common*. They also *shared* things, as the need arose. They were all part of a common bond, since they had all followed the way of Jesus.
2. The Bible also uses the word "common" in connection with the Jewish ceremonial regulations. In this sense, the concept has a "negative" connotation. It is used in the sense of being the *opposite* of "special" or "set apart (for something good)," and is usually translated by words such as, *unclean, unholy, or impure*. Because this use of the word is so different from our present focus on "sharing" (and so different from the way most people today use the word "common"), verses that have this focus are omitted from this study.

B. Common possessions of believers

1. Acts 2:44 - The believers ... had everything in *common*. [They shared with those believers who were in need.]
2. Acts 4:32 - They *shared* [had in *common*] everything they had.
 - o See v. 32-37 for examples of this.
 - o See chapter 5 for a "bad example" of sharing. Ananias and Sapphira lied by claiming that they were sharing all, though they were actually sharing only part. Keeping part of the money was OK; lying about it was a sin deserving death.

C. Common faith/salvation

1. Titus 1:4 - Paul called Titus his "true son" in their "*common* faith."
 2. Jude 1:3 - Jude says we all share the same "*common* salvation."
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THE NEW TESTAMENT GREEK WORDS USED IN THIS STUDY:

PART 1: Fellowship, Community, Sharing...

- The Greek words used in this part of the outline can be divided into two subgroups:
1) *koinoneo*, *koinonia*, *koinonikos*, and *koinonos* - which carry the general idea of "sharing," and 2) *sugkoinoneo* and *sugkoinonos* - which carry the idea of "sharing together."

PART 2: Some of the Things We Have in Common...

- All the verses in this part of the outline use the Greek word: *koinos*.