

A Biblical Study of

Fellowship

We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. We write this to make our joy complete.

1 John 1:3-4 (NIV)

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,

Philippians 3:10 (NKJV)

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV)

We have fellowship with one another,

1 John 1:7 (KJV)

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Acts 2:42 (NASB)

Philip F. Benedict
A servant of the Lord Jesus Christ

P.O. Box 496
Ridge, MD 20680

About Phil Benedict

I (Phil Benedict) grew up in a godly Christian home and was saved as a young child. I was active in our church youth group in Boise, Idaho, where I met my wife, Linda. We married when we were young and God has blessed our marriage. We have now been married for over fifty-four years (as of January 2021). We have four children, all of whom are actively serving the Lord. We both graduated from Moody Bible Institute in Chicago, Illinois, and from Boise State University in Boise, Idaho. I have also taken classes in secondary school administration at the College of Idaho in Caldwell, Idaho, as well as classes in Cherokee heritage from Northeastern State University in Tahlequah, Oklahoma, and classes in drug and alcohol counseling at Bacone College in Muskogee, Oklahoma. We have served as “full time” Christian workers for over thirty-five years. We have been members of UIM International (United Indian Missions) for over twenty-five years.

Thanks to My Wife

God has given me an exceptional wife. Linda has been a huge blessing in my life. She has been my co-worker and partner throughout life and in the writing of these study guides. She has spent many many hours editing, checking for mistakes, making suggestions, printing, and binding these study guides. She has been a genuine ministry partner. Without her, these study guides would not exist.

My Prayer

“Father, I pray that Your name will be glorified and revered through this study of fellowship. May those who go through this study grow in their understanding of fellowship and how to put that understanding into practice. I am asking that Your Spirit work in their lives and in my own life, bringing us into a greater maturity in our walk with You. May Your people devote themselves to loving and building up fellow believers. I thank and praise You for what You are doing through this study. You deserve honor, glory, and praise for who You are and for what You have done. In your name I pray.”

The Purpose of This Study -- To Understand Biblical Fellowship and How to Put It into Practice

All genuine Christians have, or should have, a common purpose and devotion to our Lord Jesus Christ. As we grow to be more like Him, we form deep bonds of love and caring for each other. This is one of the deepest, most satisfying and fulfilling of all human relationships.

God did not design us to be spiritual hermits. We need each other.

Most Christians would agree that a “good Christian” ought to “go to church”. Many do have a sincere desire to do what our Lord expects us to do and so they do faithfully attend their church. However, God’s purpose and plan for the church goes far deeper than simply fulfilling an obligation or doing what is expected of us.

Jesus prayed that we would be one with Him. (John 17) We participate (fellowship) in His divine nature. (2 Peter 1) This is a high calling. To fulfill all that God has called us to, He designed us to function together as a body where each member genuinely loves each other, encourages each other, builds each other up, serves each other, and even “spurs one-another on”.

The Word of God gives us instruction in how we are to interact with each other and to help each other to be faithful and to grow in our walk with Him. This is extremely important to the growth of individual believer and to the development of a healthy Biblical church.

Yet in spite of its value, like so many teachings in the Word of God, fellowship is often misunderstood and undervalued.

The purpose of this Bible study is to deepen our understanding of Biblical fellowship with God and with fellow believers, and to help us understand how to put this kind of fellowship into practice.

This study is written in simple to understand language. This is not written for scholars and theologians, but instead for ordinary laymen who want to understand what the Word teaches and to put it into practice.

It is my (Phil Benedict) intent to let Scripture speak for itself. The Word of God speaks clearly on the key issues of life. It is my conviction that the Word of God is far more powerful and effective than my own advice or counsel. For this reason, I have kept my own “commentary” to a minimum and have quoted many Scriptures that pertain to the subject being covered.

This study is not a book. It is simply a collection of Bible study guides on key Biblical teaching relating to fellowship. I have not attempted to make it all flow smoothly with a lot of introductions, transitions, conclusions, or lengthy explanations.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the *fellowship*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NIV)

How to Get the Most from This Study Guide

This study guide is designed to help you to learn, to understand, and to live what God teaches us in His Word, the Bible. God gave us the Bible to teach us to know and to walk with Him.

While the subject matter in this study deals with fundamental Biblical truths relating to fellowship, it is not a light study. Take your time as you go through these studies. If you go over the material too quickly without much thought, it will have little or no lasting impact on your life.

It is important that one take time to read, to digest, and to absorb the Scriptures in this study guide. Take time to carefully read and think about them. Meditate on them and the truths they teach. Regularly ask God for a right understanding of Scriptural truths and then make them part of you. Learn to love God and His Word. Commit yourself to making Biblical truths the foundation of your life and to putting them into practice every day of your life.

Bible Translations Used in These Studies

There are five different translations used throughout these studies. The translations used are the King James Version (KJV), the New King James Version (NKJV), the New American Standard Bible (NASB), the New International Version (NIV), and the English Standard Version (ESV).

The purpose of these studies is to help ordinary people understand fundamental Biblical truth. When quoting Scripture, I have tried to use the translation which most clearly states the Biblical truth being covered in that part of the study. Although these study guides will not be published or sold, I have tried to adhere to copyright laws which limit the number of Scriptures that can be quoted from each translation. No particular translation has been favored in these study guides. After each verse that is quoted, the translation is identified by giving the initials of the translation.

Scripture quotations followed by (KJV) are from the King James Version of the Bible.

Scripture quotations followed by (NKJV) are taken from the New King James Version®. Copyright ©© 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc.

Scripture quotations followed by (NASB) are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, Copyright ©© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by the Lockman Foundation.

Scripture quotations followed by (NIV) are taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version®, Copyright ©© 1973, 1978, 1984 Biblica.

Scripture quotations followed by (ESV) are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version® (ESV®), copyright ©© 2001 by Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers.

Table of Contents

A Biblical Study of Fellowship

Introduction to Fellowship Study – Page 3

Chapter One: **Understanding Fellowship** – Page 6

Chapter Two: **Love and Unity -- the Foundations of Fellowship** – Page 16

Chapter Three: Putting Biblical Fellowship into Practice
The “One-Another’s” of Scripture – Page 32

Chapter Four: **Putting Biblical Fellowship into Practice**
Serving One Another by Using Our Spiritual Gifts – Page 47

Note:

Individuals and churches have permission to download and make copies of any or all of this study for individual use or for use in group Bible studies. No part of this study may be reproduced and then sold or used in any kind of a fund-raising project. It must be given away free of charge.

Chapter One

Understanding Biblical Fellowship

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:3 (KJV)

Note: In the following verse, the word “partakers” has the same Greek root as the word “fellowship”.

For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises, so that by them you may become *partakers* of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust. 2 Peter 1:4 (NASB)

Individuals who take their walk with God seriously recognize the importance of growing in their walk with the Lord. We know that we must regularly absorb His Word and put it into practice, and we must regularly pray as He instructed us to pray. Without these in place, our spiritual life will be anemic. Yet, there is still another dimension to the Christian life that is often overlooked and undervalued. That dimension is fellowship.

Fellowship is often associated with events such as potluck dinners. These are great ☺, yet there is much more to Biblical fellowship than potluck dinners. All Christians enjoy being together with fellow believers, or at least they should. Our fellow believers are our family. In many cases they are closer than our earthly families. We love them and enjoy being around them; yet, as valuable as this is, it still does not get to the real heart of Biblical fellowship.

God did not design us to be spiritual hermits. He designed us to function together as a body. When that body does not function together as God designed it, our spiritual life and growth are retarded. If we, as God's people, are to be all that God wants us to be, we must interact with God's people as He so designed us to do. That interaction of God's people, following the instructions given in His Word, all comes under the umbrella of fellowship.

In Acts 2:42, fellowship is listed right along with teaching, prayer, and communion as the primary activities of the early church. This is one indication of the importance and value of fellowship.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

While many Christians talk about fellowship, most do not really understand it. In today's busy American society, few take the time to make fellowship with God and fellowship with His people a priority. As a result, most individual Christians and churches never achieve the spiritual growth, the unity, and the maturity that God expects in His people and in His church.

In order to better understand fellowship, look at the following words and phrases. Each of these words or phrases is used in a Biblical expository dictionary or study to describe or define fellowship.

...encouraging and building up fellow believers,
 ...sharing in the spiritual blessings of God's people,
 ...sharing of spiritual interests and convictions,
 ...sharing of spiritual beliefs and values,
 ...participating in the life of the believing community,
 ...putting the needs of fellow believers ahead of your own,
 ...one who shares in a bond or commitment or common task,
 ...making oneself a partner,
 ...having in common, to share jointly, partnership, common experiences and interests,
 ...partner, associate, participation, having mutual interests,
 ...sharing of material blessings, contribution, to share together to meet one's needs,
 ...social interaction, companionship,
 ...communion, unified together,
 ...having no part in the sins of others,

As we will see in this study, there are two fundamental Biblical kinds of fellowship. These are distinct; yet they blend into one and are intricately woven together. These two kinds of Biblical fellowship are:

1. Fellowship with God

Fellowship with God is becoming one with God and participating in His divine nature. We identify with Him, follow Him, and live a holy life, while sharing both in His suffering and in His glory.

2. Fellowship with Fellow Believers

Fellowship with fellow believers is being one in our love for the Lord Jesus Christ and in our commitment to being His disciples. We love and are devoted to each other, sharing in trials and in blessings, and interact together in such a way as to encourage, to strengthen, and to build each other up in our common faith and in our fellowship with God.

Fundamental Bible Teaching About Fellowship

There are a number of different words used in the Word of God that have the same Greek root as the word "fellowship". Some of these words are *share, sharers, sharing, partner, partnership, participate, partake, partakers, contribute, and contribution*. This is important to remember as you go through this study.

In many Scriptures used in this study, the word "fellowship" is not used. However, in some of these verses, another one of the words listed above that have the same root meaning as fellowship is used. When one of these words is used in the verses in this study, it is *italicized*. In other words, when a word is *italicized*, it has the same root meaning as the word "fellowship".

1. As Christians, we are called to fellowship with God.

In the following verses, we see that we are called to fellowship with each member of the trinity---the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit:

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.
1 Corinthians 1:9 (ESV)

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3 (KJV)

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with you all. 2 Corinthians 13:14 (ESV)

Now very carefully read the following verse. Remember, “partakers” has the same root meaning as the word “fellowship”.

...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become *partakers* of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 2 Peter 1:4 (ESV)

This is an amazing verse. Through the promises given in the Word of God, we are “*partakers of the divine nature*”. This is a profound statement. *It is the heart of fellowship with God.*

We must remember that we are created in the image and likeness of God. This fundamentally enables us to fellowship with God. We also need to remember how completely and totally God forgives and removes our sin from us. He forgives *all* our sin, and He also gives us or credits us with His own righteousness. It is because we were created in His image and because He has given us His righteousness that we can now participate in the very nature of God.

Before continuing this study, open your Bible and carefully read John 17 a couple of times and carefully think and meditate on what you read.

Following are parts of verses from John 17:20-26: **My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. *May they also be in us* so that the world may believe that you have sent me. I have given them the glory that you gave me, *that they may be one as we are one: I in them and you in me...* ...Father, I want those you have given me to be with me and to see my glory... ...in order that *the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them.*** From John 17:20-26 (NIV)

The truths in these verses are almost too profound to try to explain. They show that Jesus deeply valued His oneness with God and that He also deeply values being one with us. That is amazing. Jesus who is one with the Father also desires oneness with us. This truth alone should drive us to make being one with Him the highest priority of our life.

To be one with God is essentially the same as participating in His divine nature. This is the heart of fellowship with God. To be one with God is to strive to be conformed to the image of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is to love what God loves and hate what God hates.

When this becomes a reality, we escape the corruption of the world that can be brought on by our own sinful nature.

...by which he has granted to us his precious and very great promises, so that through them you may become *partakers* of the divine nature, having escaped from the corruption that is in the world because of sinful desire. 2 Peter 1:4 (ESV)

Before we can have genuine Biblical fellowship with each other, we must begin with fellowship with God. Without fellowship with God, there is no genuine fellowship with each other.

2. Fellowshiping with fellow believers is listed along with Bible teaching, prayer and communion as one of the foundations of the early church.

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Acts 2:42 (NASB)

3. Fellowshiping with God involves a willingness to suffer for Him.

Fellowship with God is a willingness to suffer as He suffered. As you read these verses, remember that the Biblical words “participate”, “partake”, and “share” all have the same root meaning as fellowship.

Fellowship with God is not just having a “good time” with God or with fellow believers. Fellowship with God is becoming one with Him in all His holiness. We also share in His suffering as well as sharing in His glory.

...that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death, Philippians 3:10 (NKJV)

...that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may *share* his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, Philippians 3:10 (ESV)

For to you it has been granted for Christ's sake, not only to believe in Him, but also to suffer for His sake, Philippians 1:29 (NASB)

...But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 1 Peter 2:20-21 (NIV)

But rejoice that you *participate* in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:13 (NIV)

When Jesus was on earth, He suffered. His sufferings were deep and profound. To expect to fellowship with Him but not to share in His suffering is self-centered and shallow. If we are to share in His glory, we must also expect to share in His suffering.

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you *participate* in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed. 1 Peter 4:12-13 (NIV)

There is a prevalent teaching in Christianity today that teaches that all spiritual Christians can expect continual health, wealth, and happiness, and that it is never God's will that we suffer. This is false to the core. Certainly, God promises His presence, His comfort, His protection, and His joy and His peace, but these do not teach we will never suffer. God uses the hard times to develop faith and maturity in His followers and to deepen our fellowship with Him. If we never suffer for Him, we will never have genuine fellowship with Him.

When we do go through trials, we do not have to go through them alone.

For as we *share* abundantly in Christ's sufferings, so through Christ we *share* abundantly in comfort too. If we are afflicted, it is for your comfort and salvation; and if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which you experience when you patiently endure the same sufferings that we suffer. Our hope for you is unshaken, for we know that as you *share* in our sufferings, you will also *share* in our comfort. 2 Corinthians 1:5-7 (ESV)

Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light. Matthew 11:28-30 (NKJV)

Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have summoned you by name; you are mine. When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze. For I am the LORD, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior; Isaiah 43:1-3 (NIV)

A bruised reed he will not break, and a smoldering wick he will not snuff out. Isaiah 42:3a (NIV)

God will richly reward those who suffer because of their faith.

Therefore, I exhort the elders among you, as your fellow elder and witness of the sufferings of Christ, and a *partaker* also of the glory that is to be revealed, ... 1 Peter 5:1 (NIV)

For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison, 2 Corinthians 4:17 (NASB)

For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory that is to be revealed to us. Romans 8:18 (NASB)

Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him. James 1:12 (NIV)

Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matthew 5:11-12 (NASB)

4. Observing the ordinance of communion is fellowshiping with God.

Is not the cup of blessing which we bless a *sharing* in the blood of Christ? Is not the bread which we break a *sharing* in the body of Christ? Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body; for we all *partake* of the one bread. 1 Corinthians 10:16-17 (NIV)

When we participate in communion, we share in the shed blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we share in His broken body. If we digest this Biblical truth, it adds a whole new level to our understanding and appreciation of communion services.

Communion is a picture and a celebration of a profound truth. As Christians, we are blessed beyond our understanding as He died so that we can have eternal life. When we take communion, we spiritually share in His shed blood and broken body. We will never totally understand this, but we share (fellowship) in the suffering of Christ as He died on the cross to give us life.

5. Fellowship with each other is based on our fellowship with God and our walk with Him.

That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. 1 John 1:3 (KJV)

Within the trinity, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit all have perfect love, unity, harmony and fellowship with each other. (John 14:31, John 17) There is also the giving and receiving of glory and honor. Jesus glorifies the Father and the Father glorifies the Son. (John 17:1, 22, 24, John 14:13) The Spirit guides our attention to the Son (John 14:26, 15:26) and Jesus submits to the will of the Father (Mark 14:36). God is a God of perfect love, harmony, unity, and fellowship, and He demonstrates it all within His own trinity.

God extends that fellowship to man. Since God created man in His own image, we too have the capacity to love and to fellowship. We can fellowship with other believers and we can fellowship with God Himself (1 John 1:3, Philippians 2:1). This capacity to know and love God is unique to man. No other part of God's creation has this capacity. No animal has the capacity to know, to fellowship with, and to love God. Man is able to be one with God, to love Him, and to bring Him honor, praise, and worship. This brings joy to the heart of God.

This is the message we have heard from Him and announce to you, that God is Light, and in Him there is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the

Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin. 1 John 1:5-7 (NASB)

Fellowshipping with fellow believers begins with a common fellowship with God.

To help understand this, think of a big room with one hundred pianos in it that all need to be tuned. Say someone comes in and tunes one of the pianos. Then the second piano is tuned to the first piano by a different tuner. Then another tuner comes in and tunes the third piano to the second piano. Then the fourth piano is tuned by a different tuner to the third piano. Say that this procedure is followed until all one hundred pianos are tuned. If every tuner was perfect and every piano had been perfectly tuned, they would all be in tune with each other. However, in reality, since there were one hundred different tuners, and every piano was tuned to a different piano, the last piano tuned would likely be very out of tune with the first piano tuned.

Now suppose rather than tuning the pianos with another piano, one master tuner tunes each piano using the same tuning fork for each piano. All the pianos would then automatically be in tune with each other because the same master tuner tuned each piano using the same tuning fork.

So, it is with fellowship. If each of us is in tune with God, we are automatically in tune with each other. That is why fellowship with God must be the foundation of fellowship with each other. Christians who do not make fellowship with God a high priority will never experience genuine Biblical fellowship with fellow Christians.

6. Biblical fellowship is with those who have common values and beliefs.

This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

1 John 1:5-7 (NKJV)

Therefore if there is any encouragement in Christ, if there is any consolation of love, if there is any fellowship of the Spirit, if any affection and compassion, make my joy complete by being of the same mind, maintaining the same love, united in spirit, intent on one purpose. Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves which was also in Christ Jesus,...

Philippians 2:1-5 (NASB)

In Philippians 2:1-5 our fellowship with each other is based several spiritual foundations, one of which is our fellowship with God (the Spirit). Notice how deep and complete is the oneness of those who fellowship with God.

In several places in Scripture we are identified as partners or sharers of the faith. Again, in each of these verses, “share” and “partner” have the same Greek root word as fellowship.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now, Philippians 1:3-5 (NKJV)

To the elders among you, I appeal as a fellow elder, a witness of Christ's sufferings and one who also will *share* in the glory to be revealed: 1 Peter 5:1 (NIV)

As for Titus, he is my *partner* and fellow worker among you; 2 Corinthians 8:23a (NASB)

If then you count me as a *partner*, receive him as you would me. Philemon 1:17 (NKJV)

7. Fellowshiping with fellow believers is to be devoted to one another, sharing together in our blessings and in our troubles.

For as we have many members in one body, but all the members do not have the same function, so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another. Romans 12:4-5 (NKJV)

If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:26 (ESV)

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NKJV)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

But remember the former days, when, after being enlightened, you endured a great conflict of sufferings, partly by being made a public spectacle through reproaches and tribulations, and partly by becoming *sharers* with those who were so treated. Hebrews 10:32-33 (NIV)

8. Fellowship may involve helping to meet the material needs of fellow Christians.

Remember that “contribute”, “share”, and “sharing”, all have the same Greek root as the word fellowship.

It may seem a little odd that the word “contribute” or “contribution” is another Biblical word for fellowship. However, when we contribute to the needs of another Christian, we are fellowshiping with that brother or sister in the Lord.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; not lagging behind in diligence, fervent in spirit, serving the Lord; rejoicing in hope, persevering in tribulation, devoted to prayer, *contributing* to the needs of the saints, practicing hospitality. Romans 12:10-13 (NASB)

I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or

in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength. Yet it was good of you to *share* in my troubles. Philippians 4:12-14 (NIV)

For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of *sharing* in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will. 2 Corinthians 8:3-5 (NIV)

And do not forget to do good and to *share* with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased. Hebrews 13:16 (NIV)

For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem. Romans 15:26 (NKJV)

Because of the service by which you have proved yourselves, men will praise God for the obedience that accompanies your confession of the gospel of Christ, and for your generosity in *sharing* with them and with everyone else. 2 Corinthians 9:13 (NIV)

You yourselves also know, Philippians, that at the first preaching of the gospel, after I left Macedonia, no church *shared* with me in the matter of giving and receiving but you alone; Philippians 4:15 (NASB)

But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him? 1 John 3:17 (NKJV)

9. *We are not to participate (fellowship) in sinful activities of others or to fellowship with "brothers" who refuse to turn from their sin.*

Do not *participate* in the unfruitful deeds of darkness, but instead even expose them; Ephesians 5:11 (NASB)

And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not *partakers* of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues. Revelation 18:4 (KJV)

Consider the people of Israel: are not those who eat the sacrifices *participants* in the altar? What do I imply then? That food offered to idols is anything, or that an idol is anything? No, I imply that what pagans sacrifice they offer to demons and not to God. I do not want you to be *participants* with demons. 1 Corinthians 10:18-20 (ESV)

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people. Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters,

says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NIV)

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15 (KJV)

It is impossible to share or participate in sin or be partners with sinners, and at the same time fellowship with God and His followers. God is holy, and so are we. To live close to sin is to reject fellowship with God and fellowship with His people.

If anyone comes to you and does not bring this teaching, do not receive him into your house, and do not give him a greeting; for the one who gives him a greeting *participates* in his evil deeds. 2 John 1:10-11 (NASB)

Do not be hasty in the laying on of hands, and do not *share* in the sins of others. Keep yourself pure. 1 Timothy 5:22 (NIV)

The church is not to accept into their fellowship those who are actively participating in sin. If an individual in the church will not turn from his sin, he is to be put out of the church.

And you are proud! Shouldn't you rather have been filled with grief and have put out of your fellowship the man who did this? 1 Corinthians 5:2 (NIV)

But now I am writing to you not to associate with anyone who bears the name of brother if he is guilty of sexual immorality or greed, or is an idolater, reviler, drunkard, or swindler—not even to eat with such a one. 1 Corinthians 5:11 (ESV)

Chapter Two

Love and Unity

Foundations of Fellowship

Genuine Biblical fellowship has two foundations – love and unity.

Biblical love seeks the other person's highest good. If we love each other, we will actively seek to encourage, to build up, and to serve one another. We will not seek to tear another person down.

In spite of what some would teach, the Christian life is not always easy. There are some tough times of trial and hardship. And growth in our walk with God is not automatic -- it takes discipline and effort. Genuine Christians need each other to encourage one another, to build up one another and to "*spur one another on*". This is the heart of genuine Biblical fellowship. There is far more to Biblical fellowship than simply getting together and having a "good time".

This kind of Biblical fellowship will not become a reality unless there is genuine Biblical love of our fellow believers. Genuine Biblical love goes deep; and the deeper it goes, the deeper and richer our fellowship. Without love for God and for our fellow believers, we will never do what God wants us to do and we will never be what God wants us to be. And we will never serve Him and we will never serve each other as He instructs us to serve.

A church where the people love God and love each other will be a unified church. A church that is not a unified church will be limited in its ability to encourage, to build up, and to serve each other. Their Biblical fellowship will be very restricted.

Jesus prayed that we would be one with Him (John 17). He knew that the nature of man was sinful and although all that sin is forgiven, we still are tempted to sin. The closer we are to Him, the closer we are to each other and the greater our ability to encourage each other to be godly people and to build up each other up in our walk with Him.

A divided church will never be able to accomplish God's purposes for the church. A mature church is a unified church. They are one in their union with Christ and they are one in their commitment to serve Him, to serve each other, and to mature in their walk with Him.

In this study guide we are going to take a look at these two foundations of fellowship –love and unity.

Foundations of Fellowship -- Love

Many times in the Word of God, we are told to love God and to love our fellow believers. Without that love for fellow believers, there is no genuine fellowship and there is no genuine unity.

This I command you, that you love one another. John 15:17 (NASB)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:11 (KJV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

In the New Testament there are two key words for love. They are the Greek words “agape” and “phileo”. Agape is by far the most common word. In order to better understand these two words, following are definitions or descriptions for each of them which are given in several different Bible expository word dictionaries.

Agape love (Strong’s numbers 25, and 26)

1. *To see or discern what someone’s need is and to meet that need.*
2. *Unselfish affection or tenderness for another without expecting anything in return.*
3. *Seeking another person’s highest good on the basis of a decision of the will.*
4. *A deliberate choice or act of the will as a matter of principle or duty.*
5. *An unselfish and self-sacrificing love that is ready to serve. Seeks the welfare of others.*
6. *To esteem or to regard with favor. The objects of love may not be “worthy” of that love.*

Putting all this together, we can describe or define agape love as follows:

In obedience to Biblical teaching, to see or discern what someone’s need is and, without expecting anything in return, choose to meet that need.

Agape love may or may not involve feelings of attachment to the person being shown love.

In the exercise of agape love, it will likely, in one way or another, involve a sacrificial giving of yourself. The ultimate example of this kind of giving is found in the death of our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16 (KJV)

Phileo love (Strong’s numbers 5368, 5360, and 5361)

1. *Shared interest or commitment to a common cause or cherished ideals.*
2. *Loving one’s brother, tender affection, fondness, friendship, liking a person.*
3. *Favorable interest or approval, showing hospitality.*
4. *May be inside or outside one’s family.*

Putting all this together, we can describe or define our exercise of Phileo love as follows:

Having an affection for, serving, and building up our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

Phileo love is used in reference to God’s love for His Son, for God’s love for us, and for our love for

each other.

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; Romans 12:10a (NASB)

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

In the Word of God we are never commanded to love our enemies or the people of the world (neighbors) with *phileo* (affection) love. When we are instructed to love our enemies and our neighbors, it is with *agape* (making a choice) love.

It is interesting to note that we are not commanded to love God with *phileo* love, but we are commanded to love Him with *agape* love. While at times we may feel a deep appreciation and worship of God, we most likely will not continually feel a warm fuzzy affection for Him. However, even when we don't feel that affection, we love Him by our obedience and service. This is the heart of genuine love for God.

For this is the love of God, that we keep His commandments. And His commandments are not burdensome. 1 John 5:3 (NKJV)

This is love, that we walk according to His commandments. 2 John 1:6a (NKJV)

In a very general sense, *agape* emphasizes choosing with your will to meet the needs of another person, while *phileo* involves an attachment to the ones we love. However, we need to be careful about drawing conclusions about a passage of Scripture based solely on the use of these words. Often the words can overlap and be essentially the same in their usage. Often *agape* love does involve an emotional attachment to the one we choose to love. While *phileo* love emphasizes loving those with whom we have a common bond in the Lord, *agape* love also often involves meeting the needs of our brothers and sisters in the Lord. However, *agape* love also reaches those with whom we have no common bond, or to those we may not "like". The best way to determine their "meaning" is simply to understand them according to how they are used in the text.

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love (*phileo*) for your brothers, love (*agape*) one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

Fellowship with fellow believers is rooted in both *agape* and *phileo* love. It is not hard to love those we have an affection for (*phileo*); however, we are also expected to love those who are not so easy to love (*agape*).

In the rest of this chapter, there will not normally be a distinction made between the two kinds of love. The overwhelming number of times when love is used it is *agape* love.

In order to understand Biblical fellowship, we must understand at least the basics of Biblical love.

Again, without Biblical love, there is no genuine Biblical fellowship.

Following are some key Biblical teachings about love. This is far from a comprehensive look at all the

Biblical teachings on love. It is only a brief look at some key teachings that directly relate to our study of fellowship.

1. 1 Corinthians 13

If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. If I give away all I have, and if I deliver up my body to be burned, but have not love, I gain nothing.

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 (ESV)

These are sobering verses. They vividly teach the importance of love in the life of a Christian. If our service to the Lord is not motivated by love, I am nothing and I gain nothing. What is done for our own glory accomplishes nothing of eternal value.

Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth. Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 (ESV)

Many books could be written on these few short powerful verses. They describe the godly attitudes that accompany genuine Biblical love. If we wonder if we have genuine Biblical love, it would be well to use these verses to analyze our own actions. Some of us come up woefully short on this measuring stick. However, we cannot give up and say that it is impossible – we need to commit ourselves to keep on growing, especially in exercising Biblical love.

So now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; but the greatest of these is love.

1 Corinthians 13:13 (ESV)

Faith, hope, and love are three foundations of a productive walk with God. Each is important; yet of these three, love comes to the top as the greatest of all. Even though we may feel that we lack faith, if we show love to God and His people, God is glorified and we can have the joy of knowing that we are being used by Him.

2. The death of Jesus is the ultimate example of love.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. John 3:16 (KJV)

This is how we know what love is: Jesus Christ laid down his life for us. And we ought to lay down our lives for our brothers. 1 John 3:16 (NIV)

Beloved, let us love one another, for love is from God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. The one who does not love does not know God, for God is love. By this the love of God was manifested in us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world so that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one

another. No one has seen God at any time; if we love one another, God abides in us, and His love is perfected in us. 1 John 4:7-12 (NASB)

3. Christians are instructed to love God.

The very heart and soul of the Christian faith is to love, obey, and worship God. This is *agape* love. While at times we may have emotional feelings about God, the heart of loving God is the choice to serve Him with every fiber of our being. We obey and serve Him, even if at times we really don't feel like it.

You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. Deuteronomy 6:5 (NKJV)

And he said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. Matthew 22:37-38 (ESV)

And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength. Mark 12:30 (ESV)

We love Him because He first loved us. 1 John 4:19 (NKJV)

Notice that we are to “*Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength*”. This is one of those lofty commands that few of us feel that we ever come even close to fulfilling. However, that does not excuse us from strongly committing ourselves to continually growing and maturing in our love for Him, and for growing and maturing in our overall walk with Him.

Loving God is an exclusive kind of love. We cannot love God and at the same time love what God hates. We must hate sin and strive to live a holy godly life. This is the heart of loving God. We cannot have divided loyalties. Half-heartedly loving God is not genuine love at all. Each one of us needs to genuinely search our hearts and examine our motives. Do we really love God or, realistically, do we love other things more than we love Him.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. 1 John 2:15 (KJV)

No servant can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and money. Luke 16:13 (NIV)

You adulteresses, do you not know that friendship with the world is hostility toward God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. James 4:4 (NASB)

There are many blessings in store for those who genuinely love Him.

So if you faithfully obey the commands I am giving you today--to love the LORD your God and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul -- then I will send rain on your land in its season, both autumn and spring rains, so that you may gather in your grain, new wine and oil. I will provide grass in the fields for your cattle, and you will eat and be satisfied.

Deuteronomy 11:13-15 (NIV)

4. Loving God is rooted in obedience to God.

This is love for God: to obey his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,

1 John 5:3 (NIV)

And this is love: that we walk in obedience to his commands. As you have heard from the beginning, his command is that you walk in love. 2 John 1:6 (NIV)

If you love Me, you will keep My commandments.... ...He who has My commandments and keeps them is the one who loves Me; and he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and will disclose Myself to him." Judas (not Iscariot) said to Him, "Lord, what then has happened that You are going to disclose Yourself to us and not to the world?" Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. "He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

John 14:15, 21-24 (NASB)

For many years, I personally felt guilt for not having a lot of emotional feelings of love for God. Even though I was committed to serving Him, I did not seem to have an "emotional love" for God. When I began to notice and understand some of the verses above, it was a relief for me. Fundamentally, loving God is obedience to God, not having ooey gooey lovey dubby feelings about Him. However, it is also true that there have been numerous times, especially when reading and thinking about some truth in the Word of God or singing some of the grand old majestic hymns of the faith, that I have felt deep appreciation and have given heart-felt worship and praise to God for who He is and what He has done for me.

5. It is the Spirit of God who enables us to have Biblical love.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control;... Galatians 5:22-23a (NASB)

We, as human beings, in our own selves could never love God the way we are instructed to love. However, as we allow the Spirit of God to continually fill and control us, He enables us to do what God wants us to do and be what God wants us to be. Genuine Biblical love is a fruit of the Spirit, not the results of our own selves.

The following verse gives some important characteristics or qualities of the Spirit of God.

And the spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the LORD;

Isaiah 11:2 (KJV)

When we have the Spirit of God in us, He works to develop all of these characteristics in us. Having Biblical love is made possible by the Spirit of God who enables us love as He teaches us to love.

6. Our love for God can cool.

'But I have this against you, that you have left your first love. 'Therefore remember from where you have fallen, and repent and do the deeds you did at first; Revelation 2:4-5 (NASB)

The Ephesian church had many very good qualities. Yet their love had begun to cool. This seems to be a pattern as churches age. We must not let that happen. We must keep growing in our walk with the Lord or we will stagnate and lose our love for Him.

7. God instructs us to love fellow believers.

Loving our fellow believers is the heart of fellowship. Without this love there is no genuine fellowship.

A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another. John 13:34-35 (ESV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

Let all that you do be done in love. 1 Corinthians 16:14 (NASB)

**My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command....
...This is my command: Love each other.** John 15:12-14, 17 (NIV)

Christians are not always easy to love. Sometimes we have to tolerate each other in love.

Therefore I, the prisoner of the Lord, implore you to walk in a manner worthy of the calling with which you have been called, with all humility and gentleness, with patience, showing tolerance for one another in love,... Ephesians 4:1-2 (NASB)

Love is an action. When we see a brother in need, we do all that we can to meet that need.

By this we know love, that he laid down his life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers. But if anyone has the world's goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God's love abide in him? Little children, let us not love in word or talk but in deed and in truth. 1 John 3:16-18 (ESV)

It is clear that Christians must love each other. If we do not, then we must examine ourselves to see if we are really in the faith.

When we love a fellow believer, we treat him the same way God treats us. It is not a matter of feeling; it is a matter of choice. When we deliberately choose to love one another, our feelings will begin to change and, sooner or later, we may even begin to like the person.

Again, loving our fellow believers is the very heart of fellowship. Without this love, there can be no genuine fellowship.

8. Loving fellow believers is evidence that we know and love God.

We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abides in death. 1 John 3:14 (KJV)

Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. This is how God showed his love among us: he sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 1 John 4:7-12 (NIV)

9. Love is the foundation of unity within a church.

Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. Colossians 3:14 (NIV)

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by *being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose*. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others.

Philippians 2:1-4 (NIV)

When brothers and sisters in the Lord have a Biblical love for each other, they will be unified. As stated in Philippians 2:2, they will be “*like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose*”. When this becomes a reality, there will be rich fellowship built on a common commitment

to serve the Lord together. Without that love, there will only be only a shallow level of unity, and fellowship will be superficial.

Foundations of Fellowship -- Unity

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

Psalm 133:1 (KJV)

I appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought. 1 Corinthians 1:10 (NIV)

For there to be genuine Biblical fellowship, those who are genuinely part of His family must put into practice our position of oneness with Christ.

It needs to be understood that unity is not simply an absence of hostility or division. Biblical unity is when God's people become one with the will and purpose of God. When this is true, we are automatically in sync with each other because we are all one with Him. This sounds so idealistic that it is not realistic; however, it is true. And the closer we walk with the Lord, the closer we are to each other.

...then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Philippians 2:2-3 (NIV)

God is not teaching us to be united or one with individuals or churches who, by their lives or doctrine, do not give evidence that they are genuinely part of the family of God. However, it would be hard to overstate the value of the oneness and unity of genuine Christians.

Now let's look at some more basic Biblical teaching about unity.

A. All genuine believers are members of one body.

The following verses clearly teach that all who have been genuinely saved have all been made part of one body. At the moment of our salvation the Spirit of God places us in one body, which is His church.

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NIV)

...so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for

each other. If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (NIV)

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

In 1 Corinthians 12, it stresses the fact that we are all members of one body. It does not say that Christians should be one body; but instead, it teaches that we *are* members of the same body.

For just as we have many members in one body and all the members do not have the same function, so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:4-5 (NASB)

B. Genuine believers are all members of one another.

We learn here that we are not only members of Christ's body, the church, but we are also members of each another.

...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Romans 12:5 (ESV)

We are not only members of the same body, being led and empowered by the same Spirit, but we are also "*members of one another*". We all belong to each other. This is illustrated in 1 Corinthians 12 and in Romans 12 where Christians are compared to a human body. Each part of the body is different and has a different function, but we all function together as one body and we all belong to each other.

We are not spiritual hermits -- we are all "*members one of another*". This may be difficult to fully understand, but it is a joyful reality. We are all one together. In spite of all our differences, we are one. We have many brothers and sisters in the Lord and we are all one. What a truth and what a blessing!!!

C. All genuine believers have the same Spirit (the Holy Spirit) living in them.

All saved people are indwelt by the same Spirit – the Spirit of God. This enables us to fellowship with God, and to fellowship with each other. If we stop and think about it, it is an amazing truth. All genuine believers have the Spirit of God living in them. He is our permanent companion. From the moment we are saved, we are all given the Spirit and He lives in us and He is always there beside us. He seeks to help us, to lead us, to strengthen us, and to give us all understanding, insight, and wisdom.

And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; that is the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you.

John 14:16-17 (NASB)

The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they

form one body. So it is with Christ. For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body -- whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink.

1 Corinthians 12:12-13 (NIV)

So then, those who are in the flesh cannot please God. But you are not in the flesh but in the Spirit, if indeed the Spirit of God dwells in you. Now if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he is not His. Romans 8:8-9 (NKJV)

What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you -- guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us. 2 Timothy 1:13-14 (NIV)

It is clear from this verse that if anyone does not have the Spirit in Him, he does not belong to God. In other words, anyone who does not have the Spirit of God living in them is not saved.

Since all saved people are indwelt and are being led and empowered by the by the same Spirit of God, should we not make every effort to follow His teaching and be together in our common goal of serving and glorifying our Lord Jesus Christ, and of building up and encouraging each other?

D. In the Word of God we are identified as one family -- the family of God.

And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

2 Corinthians 6:18 (KJV)

Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all people, especially to those who belong to the family of believers. Galatians 6:10 (NIV)

For this reason I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. Ephesians 3:14-15 (NIV)

He came to His own, and those who were His own did not receive Him. But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name, John 1:11-12 (NASB)

In love he predestined us for adoption as sons through Jesus Christ, according to the purpose of his will, Ephesians 1:4b-5 (ESV)

And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother." Mark 3:34-35 (NKJV)

I commend to you Phoebe our sister, who is a servant of the church in Cenchrea, Romans 16:1 (NKJV)

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, ... 1 Corinthians 15:58a (ESV)

What a blessing! All of us who have genuinely believed are all one family. We are brothers and sisters and God is our father. There are well over a hundred verses in the New Testament that, in one way or another, identify us as brothers and sisters in the Lord.

So far we have seen four ways that genuinely saved people are one.

1. We are all members of the body of Christ -- the church.
2. We are all members of each other.
3. We all have the same Spirit, the Holy Spirit, in us.
4. We are all brothers and sisters -- children of God. We are members of one family.

Take some time and think about all this. Let it sink in to your heart and soul. When we begin to grasp these truths, we can begin to understand the heart of genuine fellowship with our fellow believers.

We have seen these four ways that all genuine Christians are one. However, there is a big problem – many Christians don't put these truths into practice. Now we will look at some reasons why we should work hard to be unified and how to put unity into practice.

E. Jesus prayed for a unified church.

John 17 records the prayer of Jesus for His disciples on the evening before He was crucified. Jesus prayed for His disciples at that time and He prayed for us who would believe on Him later in time. The heart of His prayer is that His followers would be one as He and the Father are one.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be one just as We are one: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:20-23 (NKJV)

For some, it seems that this prayer of Jesus means little or nothing to them. Unity is not an issue with them and getting their own way is more important than just about any other consideration. For us to put our own desires and interests ahead of the unity in the church is to reject the prayer and the very heart of our Lord Jesus Christ.

F. A unified church is the heart of evangelism.

Now look at these same verses from John 17 again. This time look at the reason given for this prayer for oneness.

I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; "that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me. "And the glory which You gave Me I have

given them, that they may be one just as We are one: "I in them, and You in Me; that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me. John 17:20-23 (NKJV)

Carefully look at the following two statements from these verses:

(1) that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

(2) that they may be made perfect in one, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

Jesus is teaching us through this prayer that when the followers of Jesus are unified, unsaved people will believe in Jesus. They will know that Jesus is from God and they will know that God loves them. The word "know" is not just a head knowledge but a life-changing knowledge and belief in the Lord Jesus Christ. In other words, unsaved people will come to the Lord when the church is unified.

Unified Christians are the foundation of evangelism. The world will be drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ when His followers are unified.

Where there is infighting, dissension and factions among Christians, unsaved people are not drawn to the Lord. Christians can claim to have a burden for the lost and to have a heart for missions; yet, by their self-centered, selfish divisive actions they drive people away from the Lord, and all the while claim to be "led by the Spirit".

The heart of God is grieved and the world is repulsed when Christians are not unified.

G. Deep down gut level unity occurs when we all have the same attitude as the Lord Jesus Christ.

The following verses are important. Read them several times and spend some time thinking about them. If the Lord Jesus Christ means anything to us, then we are to have the same attitude that He has. When we all have the same attitude that Jesus had, we will all put His will and purposes above our own interests. And we will be united in our commitment to serve Him.

If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others. Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, ... Philippians 2:1-7 (NIV)

When a group of Christian people have this attitude in common, they would have unbelievable fellowship together.

H. Unity leads to a deeper understanding and walk with our Lord Jesus Christ.

My purpose is that they may be encouraged in heart and united in love, so that they may have the full riches of complete understanding, in order that they may know the mystery of God, namely, Christ, ... Colossians 2:2 (NIV)

Do you want to richly understand and know Him and receive blessings from God? If you do, then be one with a group of believers who are committed to the same thing.

I. Unity doesn't just happen. It requires a strong commitment and effort on our part.

Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. Ephesians 4:3 (NIV)

Notice that we are to “*make every effort*” to keep unity, bound together by peace. Keeping unity requires endurance that comes from God.

Now may the God who gives perseverance and encouragement grant you to be of the same mind with one another according to Christ Jesus, Romans 15:5 (NASB)

Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind. Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called, that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. 1 Peter 3:8-11 (ESV)

J. Unity is part of God's design for the church as He outlines for us in Ephesians 4:11-16.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; until we all attain to the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a mature man, to the measure of the stature which belongs to the fullness of Christ. As a result, we are no longer to be children, tossed here and there by waves and carried about by every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, by craftiness in deceitful scheming; but speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects into Him who is the head, even Christ, Ephesians 4:11-15 (NASB)

K. Disunity and selfishness come from the sinful nature.

Now the works of the flesh are evident: sexual immorality, impurity, sensuality, idolatry,

sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, rivalries, dissensions, divisions, envy, drunkenness, orgies, and things like these. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. Galatians 5:19-21 (ESV)

L. Stirring up dissension is detestable and an abomination to God.

These six things doth the LORD hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that devises wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, A false witness that speaks lies, and he that sows discord among brethren. Proverbs 6:16-19 (KJV)

M. God instructs us to have nothing to do with a divisive person.

As for a person who stirs up division, after warning him once and then twice, have nothing more to do with him, knowing that such a person is warped and sinful; he is self-condemned.

Titus 3:10-11 (ESV)

N. God does not instruct us to be one or unified with unbelieving churches, organizations, or individuals.

And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.

Ephesians 5:11 (NKJV)

It should be noted again that all of these teachings on oneness and unity apply to genuinely saved members of the body of Christ. These instructions are *not* saying that we should ignore wrong doctrine and unbiblical conduct and just become one big happy family with all who say they are followers of God. Scripture is clear that we are to have nothing to do with unfruitful works of darkness, and that includes many who call themselves "Christians".

Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness? What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols? For we are the temple of the living God. As God has said: "I will live with them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they will be my people." "Therefore come out from them and be separate, says the Lord. Touch no unclean thing, and I will receive you." "I will be a Father to you, and you will be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty." 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 (NIV)

From these verses carefully note the following: *What harmony is there between Christ and Belial? What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever? What agreement is there between the temple of God and idols?* It is clear from these verses that we cannot be one in a Biblical sense with unbelievers. We have nothing in common with unbelievers. We are not to be yoked or unified with unbelievers or unbiblical causes.

We should *not* be one with churches or individuals who teach false doctrine or who are not committed to correctly teaching the fundamentals of the Biblical truth. *There are some minor doctrinal differences among Christians that should not be roadblocks to unity.* However, we are not one with false teachers and we are not one with those who do not recognize all of the Word of God as God's revelation of divine truth to man and the final authority for doctrine and conduct.

It would be well to note that this is *not* teaching that we are to have nothing to do with unbelievers. If we isolate from unbelievers, how are we to lead them to reconciliation with God? We are the light of the world and unbelievers must be able to see our light. There is a big difference between being associated with someone and being unified together as part of the family of God.

The following verses clearly indicate that we are to abound in love, but we are to love with knowledge, insight, and discernment.

And this I pray, that your love may abound still more and more in real knowledge and all discernment, so that you may approve the things that are excellent, in order to be sincere and blameless until the day of Christ; having been filled with the fruit of righteousness which comes through Jesus Christ, to the glory and praise of God. Philippians 1:9-11 (NASB)

Chapter Three

Putting Fellowship Into Practice

The “One-Anothers” of Scripture

The first two study guides in this study of fellowship were written to help us understand what Biblical fellowship is and to help us understand the Biblical foundations of fellowship – love and unity. The next two study guides will cover how to put into practice what we have learned about Biblical fellowship in the first two study guides.

In this study guide we are going to look at the “one-anothers” of Scripture. These instruct us in how God instructs us to interact and fellowship with each other as members of His body and as members of each other. There are about thirty separate “one-another” commands in the New Testament. Some of these are repeated numerous times. These commands are a key part of God’s design for the church. They are the heart of how we are to interact and fellowship with fellow believers. Putting these one-anothers into practice is necessary if we, as individuals, are to grow in our walk with Him as He intends for us to grow. God did not design us to function alone in our spiritual walk. He planned for us to be loved, built up, encouraged, and to grow as we walk in harmony with a group of believers who are also seeking to mature in their walk with the Lord.

In spite of their importance in God’s design for the church, they are basically ignored by many churches. We need to give heed to these teachings. If we, as individuals, are going to be productive fruitful members of His body, and if the church is to be a Biblically unified spiritually maturing church, we must put these one-anothers into practice. If we fail, we will always be a weak, immature, lukewarm church.

Putting these teachings into practice is not optional – it is absolutely necessary.

To help understand and digest these one-anothers, we have divided the “one-another” commands into three groups.

- A. In Group A are one-another commands which all closely relate to loving one-another.
- B. In Group B are one-another commands which all closely relate to building up one-another.
- C. In Group C are one-another commands which all closely relate to living in harmony (unity) with one-another.

There is a considerable amount of overlap between these groups. In reality, all the “one-anothers” relate and interact with each other. Each one is distinct; yet they all work together. It would be difficult, if not impossible, to put any one of them into practice without putting many of the others into practice as well.

Group A – Love One-Another

As we have already seen, loving each other and being one are the heart of Biblical fellowship. *These commands are a foundation of fellowship and of all interaction between believers. If the command to*

love one another is not being practiced, it will be useless to try to put the rest of the “one-anothers” into practice.

In order to understand what it means to love one another, we need to understand the Biblical definitions or concepts of love. Remember “agape” love is to choose to meet the needs of others, even those we may not “like”. It may be helpful to go back and review the section on love in Study Guide Two of this study before continuing on.

This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. John 15:12 (KJV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another. 1 John 4:11 (KJV)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor;
Romans 12:10 (NASB)

Now that you have purified yourselves by obeying the truth so that you have sincere love for your brothers, love one another deeply, from the heart. 1 Peter 1:22 (NIV)

Many of us have heard these instructions all of our life, but like so many, we never stop to give it much thought. Many of us need to take a good hard look at ourselves and determine how we can begin to seriously put them into practice. When we do start loving each other, there is a deep satisfaction and joy as we interact with our fellow believers.

In a local church there may be a tremendous variety of individuals who attend. There may be individuals from different races, different “social classes”, some who are financially well off, and some who have very little. People have different personalities, different levels of growth in their Christian life, and a multitude of other differences; yet we are all to “*love each other deeply from the heart*” and we are to be *devoted to one another in brotherly love*”. This is a beautiful thing and, again, this is the heart of Biblical fellowship.

There are any number of reasons why it might be difficult for some to show Christian love to a fellow believer. Many might hesitate to show Biblical love to others because they fear rejection. Hopefully, in the body of Christ this won’t happen, but it might. If our expression of love is rejected, we keep on loving anyway. God will bless our obedience. Some who have not come from a caring home or church background just don’t know how to show love, and they may feel unable to love. Others who are hanging on to anger and resentment will not be capable of love until they get rid of their anger. Others spend so much time thinking about themselves they never stop to think about others. Whatever the case, to enjoy fellowshiping with fellow Christians we will have to take the steps necessary to begin showing love to fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. It may be that seeking the counsel of a more mature fellow Christian may be helpful in taking this very important step.

Loving other Christians is a broad command. The following “one-another commands” all, in one way or another, help us understand how to put the commands to love one-another into practice.

2. Therefore, accept one another, just as Christ also accepted us... Romans 15:7a (NASB)

With all of our differences, we accept each other as brothers and sisters in the Lord. It is natural to be drawn to some people more than to others. This is as true with Christians as it is with others. However, as followers of the Lord Jesus Christ, we deliberately determine that we will accept into our fellowship all other genuine believers, even those we have trouble “liking”.

3. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:32 (NIV)

Being kind is not hard to understand. It simply means to be kind. Kindness and gentleness are an evidence of the Spirit of God at work in and through us. This may seem so basic that it hardly needs to be said; yet, most of us do not really stop to think of how we can be kind to each other.

Our fellow believers probably include members of our own human families, such as our husband or wife, our children, and our parents. We are not only to be kind to fellow believers in the church, we are also to be kind to members of our own families – even when they irritate us at times.

Closely tied to the instructions to be kind, is the command to be compassionate to one another. Compassion takes kindness to a deeper level. We care about each other and when they hurt, we hurt. When they have needs, we follow Biblical principles and seek to meet those needs.

We are also told to be tender-hearted. Being kind to one another is an action, while being tender-hearted is an emotion. This may be more difficult for some of us. If so, we need to recognize our responsibility and commit ourselves to obedience and ask God for the capacity to be tender-hearted loving people.

If we harbor on-going resentment or dislike of a fellow believer, it is sin and must be recognized as such and confessed. We must also forgive each other – which will be dealt with later in this study guide.

4. Clothe yourselves, all of you, with humility toward one another, for “God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.” 1 Peter 5:5 (ESV)

Do nothing from selfishness or empty conceit, but with humility of mind regard one another as more important than yourselves; Philippians 2:3 (NASB)

Be devoted to one another in brotherly love; give preference to one another in honor; Romans 12:10 (NASB)

In the Christian life there is no room for feeling superior or better than any other member of the body of Christ. In fact, we are to consider others better than ourselves, (Philippians 2:1-11) and we should care for the needs of others in the same way we care for our own needs. We are to give preference to one another.

Look at these verses again. *“God opposes the proud but gives grace to the humble.”* Pride in ourselves, in who we are or what we have done, has no place in the life of a follower of the Lord Jesus Christ. Anyone who is committed to being a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ must actively seek to be a humble person. Proud believers must confess their pride as a sin, and recognize that they are simply a sinner saved by grace. Any gifts or abilities or possessions we have are given to us by God.

Being humble is a fundamental principle in following God-given instructions for Biblical fellowship. A proud Christian will find it hard, if not impossible, to live in harmony with fellow believers and will certainly be unable follow instructions such as, *“give preference to one another in honor”*, or *“submit to one another”*, or to *“wash one another’s feet”*. We must not let pride interfere with our being a productive member of the fellowship of believers. All of us need to bury our pride and commit ourselves to serving the Lord Jesus Christ and His followers – our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

In John 13, while the disciples were arguing about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of God, Jesus wrapped a towel around Himself, took a basin of water and began washing the disciple’s feet. Washing someone’s feet was a humble thing to do. Yet, the sovereign God, the creator of the universe, washed the disciple’s feet and set an example for us to follow.

5. ...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together. 1 Corinthians 12:25-26 (ESV)

Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. Galatians 6:2 (NIV)

The body of Christ is one body and we who are all genuine believers are members of that body. When one member hurts, the whole body feels his/her pain and they intercede before the Lord on behalf of the one suffering. They readily and cheerfully do all they can to alleviate the suffering.

On the other side, we rejoice when a member is honored or blessed. This must be genuine rejoicing. *There is no room for pride in the person who has been honored and there is no room for jealousy or envy in other members of the body.*

This kind of sharing is an expression of love that comes from a group of people who are committed to serving and honoring the Lord Jesus Christ and are committed to loving and serving each other.

6. Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ. Ephesians 5:21 (NIV)

Within the body of Christ there is a mutual submissiveness. To submit to a fellow believer means that we are willing to serve, to respect, and to honor fellow Christians, putting their interests above our own. We are willing to be taught by them and we are open to their admonition and to their counsel. Even the most educated and “mature” Christian must be willing to serve and to learn from those less advanced in their faith. All members must be willing to serve and learn from all the other members of the body, even those we may not personally “like”.

If we submit to one another, we do not become angry and defensive when someone disagrees with us.

Instead, we seek to find what the Word of God teaches about a certain issue. What a joy this kind of harmony can be, when we all choose to be obedient to God and we serve and learn from each other.

7. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another.

Colossians 3:13 (NIV)

Christians are far from perfect. Sometimes we get on each other's nerves. At times we simply have to "bear with each other", or put up with each other. There may be times we need to peacefully discuss problems we have with each other. Through it all, we still commit ourselves to living in harmony with each other. In the end, God is honored and the world notices the testimony of God's people. We also live with a clear conscience about how we treat and talk about fellow believers.

8. Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. 1 Peter 4:9 (ESV)

Not only are we to "*bear with each other*" and to "*live in harmony with one another*", we are to show hospitality to each other. We are to be kind and to share our time, our homes, our possessions, and our lives with our fellow believers. What's more, we are to do it without grumbling. In other words, we are to show practical love to our fellow believers with cheerful attitudes.

9. Greet one another with a holy kiss. Romans 16:16, 1 Corinthians 16:20, 1 Peter 5:14, 2 Corinthians 13:12, 1 Thessalonians 5:26

The instruction to "*Greet one another with a holy kiss*" is repeated five times in Scripture. Apparently, it must be important. The emphasis is on greeting one another, not on the kissing. Obviously, cultures vary in the way they greet each other. In our culture these instructions might read "greet each other with a warm hearty handshake". From time to time our greeting may also include a warm hug. This is certainly within the scope of a Biblical greeting.

When we take time to greet our brothers and sisters in the Lord, we are letting them know that we value their presence. A warm greeting communicates acceptance and appreciation. A Biblical greeting carries with it the idea of welcoming those we are greeting. We are glad to be with them. In our society where few have the time to meaningfully interact with other people, a warm greeting can be very meaningful and, at times, even healing.

Notice it is to be a "holy" greeting. Holy means that it is pure and clean. A holy greeting does not hide disdain or deceit. It is a genuine expression of welcome and gladness to be with them. If we cannot genuinely welcome another believer, we need to examine ourselves to see where the problem is and then take steps to correct the situation. When we greet one another, it must be sincere. Even if the person we are greeting is not a good friend, we can still be sincere in our greeting. If we are at odds with someone, then get it straightened out to the point where we can sincerely greet them.

It seems unnecessary to say, but a holy greeting certainly rules out any greeting or hugs with an ulterior motive. Hugging anyone for impure reasons is certainly out of place among Christians at church or, for that matter, anywhere else.

Churches clearly have different personalities. In recent years, my wife and I have visited in two churches where people seemed to go out of their way to *avoid* any kind of a greeting. They appeared to be cold and indifferent. When my wife, Linda, and I left, neither of us had any desire to attend either of those churches again. If we want to attract others to the Lord Jesus Christ, or to our church, we must go out of our way to warmly and sincerely greet them. If we want to communicate Christian love, the least we can do is give a warm greeting.

10. When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments and resumed his place, he said to them, “Do you understand what I have done to you? You call me Teacher and Lord, and you are right, for so I am. If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another’s feet. For I have given you an example, that you also should do just as I have done to you.” John 13:12-15 (ESV)

Jesus set an example of humble love and service when He washed the feet of the proud disciples. Jesus instructs us to follow His example and to wash one another’s feet. Washing feet was the job of a servant. We, too, must have the heart of a servant and humbly serve our fellow members of the body of Christ.

Group B – Building Up Fellow Believers

Another foundation in God’s plan for the church is that we are to actively seek to build up our fellow believers. Spiritual growth takes determination and discipline. All of us find ourselves slipping from time to time and falling short of the walk with God that we desire. One of God’s remedies for this is that we are to seek to build up and encourage each other. We are to “*spur one another on*”. We need each other. We need to seek to build each other up.

This, I believe, is one of the most neglected ministries of the church. We expect the pastor to teach and encourage believers, but it seems as if only occasionally do laymen seek to build up fellow believers. This is simply not being taught in many churches.

The following verses are not speaking just to pastors; they are instructions given to every Christian.

So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another.
Romans 14:19 (NASB)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

We who are strong have an obligation to bear with the failings of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. Romans 15:1-2 (ESV)

Every one of us has the responsibility to help build up fellow Christians. We are even to build up those fellow believers that we have trouble liking.

We must not take these instructions lightly. Often, we hear Scripture but give very little thought as to how we should put it into practice. Building up fellow believers is fundamental to God's program for the church; yet, many of us hardly give a second thought as to how we can put it into practice.

There are several "one another" commands that fit together under the general heading of building up one another.

1. But encourage one another day after day, Hebrews 3:13 (NASB)

But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness. Hebrews 3:13 (NIV)

Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.
1 Thessalonians 5:11 (ESV)

Therefore encourage one another with these words. 1 Thessalonians 4:18 (ESV)

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another -- and all the more as you see the Day approaching. Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

We all need to be encouraged -- day after day.

Jesus knew we needed encouragement and before He died, He promised His disciples to send another Helper after Jesus returned to heaven.

And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you. John 14:16-17 (ESV)

God gives us His own Spirit to help us to be what He wants us to be and to do what He wants us to do. In this passage and also in John 16, the Spirit is identified as our Helper, or one who is called along beside us to help us. The Spirit is also in us. He is both beside us and He is in us, enabling us to live as God wants us to live.

In this passage the Spirit of God is identified as a helper. The Greek word used in these passages for the Spirit or helper is "paraklete", or one called alongside to help. It is interesting to note that in the verses that instruct us to encourage each other, the word "encourage" has the same Greek root as the word "helper" or "paraklete" which describes the Holy Spirit. *When a brother or sister needs help, we, along with the Holy Spirit, come along side that person to give help and encouragement.*

We, as Christians, know that we have the presence of the Spirit in our lives; yet, we also need each other to help and encourage us. *We, as Christians, are to come along beside our fellow Christians and*

help and encourage them, just as the Holy Spirit comes along beside us and helps us.

It is good to have the Spirit of God as our Helper and enabler. Yet, God also knew that we needed other *people* to come along beside us and to encourage us. What a blessing when we know that our fellow believers care enough to give encouragement when it is needed.

2. Serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13b (NIV)

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace:
1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

Believers are to be willing to serve each other. This can be done in many different ways. We need to learn to look for ways to serve our brothers and sisters in the Lord.

A more specific way of serving is to use our spiritual gift to serve each other. Every genuine believer has been given a spiritual for the "common good" of the church. This is important. The next chapter in this fellowship study guide is devoted entirely to this topic.

3. Teach one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, ... Colossians 3:16a (NIV)

I myself am satisfied about you, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able to instruct one another. Romans 15:14 (ESV)

All Christians, whether we are "teachers" or not, are to be involved in teaching each other. God certainly calls and gifts some to be teachers of His Word. That is one of the spiritual gifts. Teachers are extremely important in the church. However, that is *not* what these verses are referring to. All believers, no matter what their spiritual gift is, are to teach fellow believers.

For these instructions to teach each other to be a reality, we need to get away from the idea of a classroom teaching situation for a moment and think of how individual Christians can teach each other. We can teach by the way we live. We can teach by being in tune with each other and knowing the problems each other faces and, when appropriate, we give advice and counsel. We remind each other of Biblical truths that relate to situations we face in life. If we ask for direction from the Spirit and then look for ways to build up and teach each other, He will open the right doors for us to teach fellow believers.

Teaching one another comes as we "*let the word of Christ dwell in you richly*". Those who are not regularly absorbing the Word of God are in no position to teach others. This is another motivation to regularly read and study the Word.

4. Admonish one another.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another... Colossians 3:16a (KJV)

Admonish is a somewhat stronger word than teach. To admonish is to warn about wrong in the life of a fellow believer. If we love one another and seek to build each other up, we will care enough to warn about the wrong in their life.

And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge and able also to admonish one another.

Romans 15:14 (NASB)

Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted. Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

Again, admonishing comes from the heart of one in whom “*the Word of God dwells richly*”. If one’s own heart is not in tune with the Lord’s heart, then we have no business trying to correct someone else’s wrong.

We must be absolutely certain that we ourselves are absorbing and practicing the Word, and we must be certain that what we are admonishing in the life of a brother is wrong by Biblical standards. Admonishing is to be done with wisdom. When the Word dwells in us richly, we will have the Biblical understanding and wisdom to do it right.

We ask you, brothers, to respect those who labor among you and are over you in the Lord and admonish you, 1 Thessalonians 5:12 (ESV)

We are not to be angry or resent someone who admonishes us. Even if a part of us gets a little angry or resentful, we still listen in love and genuinely evaluate and apply what is said.

5. Be on your guard! If your brother sins, rebuke him; and if he repents, forgive him.

Luke 17:3 (NASB)

Those who continue in sin, rebuke in the presence of all, so that the rest also will be fearful of sinning. 1 Timothy 5:20 (NASB)

The two words admonish and rebuke are related, but not the same. To rebuke or to reprove definitely is more intense than admonish. Admonish is more gentle. When someone is admonished to correct a wrong behavior, but does not respond, the next step may be a rebuke.

Without doubt, the hardest “one-another” to carry out is to rebuke a brother or sister in the Lord because of sin in his/her life. This is seldom done, because, most simply, we do not want to be that involved in someone else’s life. We are afraid that the other person will be angry and will reject what we have to say. It is much easier to simply ignore the sin in the life of a fellow believer. It is none of our business.

Yet, according to God, it is our business. In spite of our reluctance, God's instructions have not changed. When a brother sins, we are to admonish and/or rebuke him.

Brethren, even if anyone is caught in any trespass, you who are spiritual, restore such a one in a spirit of gentleness; each one looking to yourself, so that you too will not be tempted.

Galatians 6:1 (NASB)

The whole purpose of a rebuke or admonition is to bring about the restoration of the sinning brother. If he repents, forgive him. With the repentance comes forgiveness and restoration. Again, there must be no desire on our part to humiliate or put down the sinning brother. Let God do the judging; we are to focus on restoration.

Read the verse above carefully. The rebuke is to be done by someone who is "spiritual". The rebuking must be done by someone who is walking with the Lord and who has the right motives for the rebuking or admonishing. However, this must not be used as a cop out. We cannot say, "I am not spiritual enough, so let the preacher or someone else do it".

We are instructed to deal with the offending brother gently. It is to be done in love, not anger. It would be best not to do it at all than to deal with the sinning brother in anger. Actions taken in anger seldom have beneficial results.

In the following verses we are told to get the plank out of our own eye before removing the sawdust from someone else's eye. Notice that it does not say to forget the whole process if you have a plank in your eye. We are told to get the plank out of our own eye and then go to the brother with the sawdust in his eye. In other words, the plank is not an excuse for inaction. Rather it is cause for us to deal with both our own sin and the sin of a brother.

Why do you see the speck that is in your brother's eye, but do not notice the log that is in your own eye? Or how can you say to your brother, 'Let me take the speck out of your eye,' when there is the log in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye. Matthew 7:3-5 (ESV)

6. Spur one another on.

Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

Here we are instructed to "*spur one another on to love good deeds*". Part of the fellowship among believers is to do all we can to help them grow and develop, even to the point of "spurring them on". I suspect that this could be done in many different ways; however, any action taken must be done in gentleness, love, and concern for the brothers and sisters involved.

7. Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective. James 5:16 (NIV)

When there is a sin in one's life that he/she is having a difficult time getting victory over, then one more step that they can take is for the individual to admit that sin, first to God, and then to a fellow Christian or a group of Christians. The believers to whom one confesses need to be spiritually mature individuals who can be trusted not to gossip or to break confidences.

When this step is taken, those to whom the sin is confessed should immediately pray. Then there must be on-going prayer for the individual over the next days, weeks, months, and even years. Again remember, *"The prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"*.

8. Pray for one another. James 5:16 (NASB)

And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Ephesians 6:18 (NIV)

Now I urge you, brethren, by our Lord Jesus Christ and by the love of the Spirit, to strive together with me in your prayers to God for me,

Romans 15:30 (NASB)

In the Word of God there are many passages that, in one way or another, teach us to pray for one another. Prayer is a powerful tool to use in our battle against sin. We need to regularly pray for ourselves and we need to regularly ask others to pray for us. Let fellow Christians share in your struggle against sin by praying with you. Remember, *"the prayer of a righteous man is powerful and effective"*.

It would be well for all of us to take a look at the apostle Paul's prayers for fellow believers, and then begin incorporating those prayers into our own prayers for our fellow believers. This would ensure that we are praying in the will of God, and then we can expect positive answers to our prayers for each other.

A while back I asked a Bible study group for practical suggestions for building up fellow believers. Here are some of their suggestions:

- ...Spend time in prayer with fellow believers.
- ...Share things you have learned from the Word of God.
- ...Go visit in the homes of fellow believers.
- ...Help each other in times of trouble.
- ...Say something pleasant to a fellow believer.
- ...Send an encouraging card to fellow believers.
- ...Remember important days in the lives of fellow believers.
- ...Smile!!!

Now you think of ways that you can build up, encourage, or teach fellow Christians.

Group C – Living in Harmony (Unity) with One Another

Finally, all of you, live in harmony with one another; be sympathetic, love as brothers, be compassionate and humble. 1 Peter 3:8 (NIV)

1. ... be at peace with one another. Mark 9:50b (ESV)

Closely tied to the command to be in harmony with one-another is this command to be at peace with one-another. This verse is not hard to understand. It simply means what it says -- be at peace with one another.

This sounds simple and it is; yet it is profound. If the will and purposes of God are to be done, we must be at peace with each other. Infighting and divisions hinder the work of the church. Instead, we must love and build one another up, not tear each other down.

As we saw in the fellowship Study Guide Two, unity is at the very heart of Biblical fellowship. If the church is not one in Christ, there will be no genuine fellowship with God or fellowship with each other.

Like all the members of a musical symphony harmonize and produce beautiful music together, so it is with God's people. When we are in harmony together, we exalt our Lord Jesus Christ; we fellowship with God; we fellowship with each other; and the world is drawn to the Lord as a result of the testimony of the church. Remember, the unity of the church is the foundation of evangelism. (John 17:20-26)

Unity is not just a nice concept, but rather an active pursuit and commitment for every Christian who wants to exalt and please our Lord Jesus Christ. When God's people are not one, the heart of God is grieved and the world is not drawn to our Lord.

2. ... forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. Colossians 3:13b (NIV)

Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you. Ephesians 4:31-32 (NIV)

Every genuine Christian has been forgiven by God of a lifetime of sin. Without God's forgiveness we would be condemned by God to an everlasting separation from God in an eternal hell. Yet God, in His love, His grace, and His mercy has forgiven us. We stand before God justified and righteous. That is a precious truth.

In the same way God forgave us, we are instructed to forgive each other. There are times when wounds inflicted by fellow Christians can hurt deeply. Even though this is true, none of us has come close to suffering like our Lord suffered on the cross. Yet, the first words He spoke on the cross were

"Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing". (Luke 23:34) This is the example we are to follow.

We must forgive each other. To refuse to forgive is disobedience and rebellion.

Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors.... ...For if you forgive men when they sin against you, your heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive men their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins. Matthew 6:12,13-15 (NIV)

Forgive us our sins, for we also forgive everyone who sins against us. Luke 11:4 (NIV)

When Jesus taught His followers to pray, (Matthew 6) He instructed them to ask God for forgiveness based on the fact that we have forgiven those who have sinned against us. This is not talking about salvation, but rather it is speaking of God's on-going forgiveness of His children that maintains our fellowship and walk with Him. If we do not forgive those who sin against us, we cannot expect parental forgiveness from God and we cannot expect to enjoy fellowship with Him.

A practical definition of forgiving is -- *getting rid of our anger and making the choice not to hold on to a grudge or to seek revenge.*

The only real motive for not forgiving and holding on to anger is wanting revenge or wanting to get even. There is no other reason for not forgiving and for holding on to anger.

The Bible states that revenge belongs to God.

Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay, says the Lord.' Romans 12:19 (NIV)

Cease from anger, and forsake wrath: fret not thyself in any wise to do evil. For evildoers shall be cut off: but those that wait upon the LORD, they shall inherit the earth. Psalm 37:8-9 (KJV)

Forgiving is not hard if you will make the decision to let God handle the revenge. Tell God that you are putting the whole thing in His hands and you are going to back off and let Him handle it. God is a just God and He will avenge wrong. His judgment is always right. You need to put your trust in God and leave it there.

Forgiveness begins with a mental choice. We may not feel like forgiving, but we choose to forgive anyway because we choose to obey God. Not forgiving and holding on to anger will only lead to more spiritual defeat. Be obedient to God and choose to forgive, even if you don't really feel like it.

After you choose to forgive a person, reaffirm that decision over the next few days, weeks, months, or even years if necessary. At first you may not feel any different; however, once you make the mental choice to forgive, your feelings will eventually come into line with the mental choice you have made. If you never begin by making the mental choice to forgive, you will never be at peace with God or with yourself and you will continue in your anger and spiritual defeat.

Not forgiving or holding on to anger can also lead to all kinds of problems such as depression, stress, bitterness, strained relationships, physical problems, etc., etc., etc. Forgiving is a big step toward

spiritual growth, personal freedom, peace, good mental health and even good physical health.

Forgiving someone does not necessarily mean that you will like or respect the person you are forgiving. And contrary to the popular expression “forgive and forget”, you will probably not forget what happened. However, while you will probably not totally forget about it, after you have made the choice to forgive, you do not have to keep on thinking about it all the time.

3. So then each one of us will give an account of himself to God. Therefore let us not judge one another anymore, ... Romans 14:12-13a (NASB)

Do not complain, brethren, against one another, so that you yourselves may not be judged; behold, the Judge is standing right at the door. James 5:9 (NASB)

Christians are not to judge each other with the intent of tearing them down. When we do that, we are inviting the judgment of God against ourselves. All Christians will give an account of themselves to God. If someone has sinned against you, they will have to give an account to God for it. God will judge and avenge the sin. That is not our job. In obedience to God we let Him do the judging. If we try to take God’s place and judge a person ourselves, we will do nothing but grieve God and hurt people, and we also invite God’s judgment on ourselves.

4. Do not speak evil against one another, brothers. James 4:11 (ESV)

Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, Ephesians 4:29 (NIV)

The Word of God is crystal clear. We are to control our tongues. Many Scriptures teach this. We must not speak evil against a fellow believer, but rather say only what will build him up. We must forgive and move on. God will handle the sin in the life of whoever sinned against you

Here again, we are instructed to control our tongues. Christians are not to run each other down. If we say something about someone, it must be for the purpose of building them up. We must not say things that will discredit or tear them down – even if we believe it is entirely true.

If we know there is sin in another person’s life, then there is a Biblical pattern for dealing with it. Talking negatively about them to other members of the body of Christ is not part of that God-given pattern.

5. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, Colossians 3:9 (NKJV)

Christians must not lie to each other. This seems obvious. Lying is a direct violation of one of the ten commandments. However, many Christians seem to feel it is not very wrong to tell a “little white lie”. For some, lying seems to be a way of life. They say whatever seems beneficial to them at the moment, whether it is fully true or not. Habitual lying or occasionally telling a “little white lie” is sin and it

needs to be repented of. Lying is always wrong and will always have negative consequences. We cannot lie and expect good to come from it. If we claim to fellowship with God, we cannot lie to His people or to anyone else.

6. If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. Galatians 5:15 (NIV)

“Biting and devouring each other” is very serious. When members of the body of Christ tear each other down and even “destroy” each other, it will severely damage the testimony of the church and may cause others to stumble in their walk with the Lord. When we engage in this kind of behavior, we invite the discipline and judgment of God. We also lose eternal rewards, which will affect us for an eternity.

If *“biting and devouring each other”* is taking place in a church and those responsible refuse to stop, according to the Word of God, they should be expelled from the church and fellowship with them withdrawn.

I am personally very familiar with a church that had a “church fight” that split the church. Over thirty-five years later, the church and individuals in the church have still not fully recovered.

7. Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other. Galatians 5:25-26 (NIV)

As we have already seen, all Christians have the Spirit of God in them and beside them. The Spirit of God, through the Word of God, instructs us to be at peace with one another. If we engage in disputes, seeking to promote our own interests, irritating and being jealous of each other, we are not being led by the Spirit of God, no matter how pious we may appear. Spirit-filled Christians are at peace with each other.

Chapter Four

Putting Fellowship Into Practice

Exercising Our Spiritual Gifts to Serve “One Another”

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace:
1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

Serve one another in love. Galatians 5:13b (NIV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (NASB)

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

Sitting down, He called the twelve and said to them, "If anyone wants to be first, he shall be last of all and servant of all." Mark 9:35 (NASB)

From Scripture we find that God has equipped each of us with a specific ability or capacity to serve Him by serving and building up fellow members of His body (the church). According to His own will and purpose, He places us in the body where He wants us to be, and He equips and empowers us to serve as He wants us to serve. The term “spiritual gift” is often used to identify that special ability that God has given us to serve Him.

A spiritual gift is a Spirit-given and Spirit-powered ability given to an individual believer through which the Spirit of God ministers to other members of His body.

When a believer exercises his spiritual gift(s), other believers will benefit. They will be encouraged, strengthened, taught, admonished or helped in some way. When we exercise our spiritual gifts, other Christians will mature in their faith and the church will become more mature and unified. Christians will grow in their walk with God and through it all the Lord Jesus Christ is honored and glorified.

Only genuine believers have a spiritual gift. It is a supernaturally given ability or capacity. A spiritual gift is not a skill that can be learned simply by study or practice. Unserved people can learn skills such as accounting, carpentry, or any of hundreds of other skills that can be acquired, but they are not spirit-empowered abilities given specifically to enable fellow believers to be strong in the faith and to grow in their walk with God.

The Value of Spiritual Gifts

The following passage is a description of a mature, unified, and growing church. This passage begins with God’s gifting some to be leaders of the church. The role of those leaders is to prepare God’s

people to serve Him. We find in 2 Timothy 3:16-17 that this preparing or equipping is done by teaching them the Word of God. As God's people learn the Word and put it into practice, they are prepared for "*works of service*". They serve Him in the capacity that God leads them. In other words, they are equipped for service, using the gifts and abilities that are given them by the Spirit of God and also empowered by the Spirit of God. This passage goes on to describe a mature, unified, growing church. The last sentence in this passage of Scripture states that this growth and maturity all takes place as church leaders and each member does his part. The service of every member is important and is needed in the growth and development of the church.

It was he (God) who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, *to prepare God's people for works of service*, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ. ...Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of men in their deceitful scheming. Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, *as each part does its work*.

Ephesians 4:11-16 (NIV)

This passage in Ephesians 4 is one of the most complete descriptions of a mature church given in the Word of God. Notice what is said about this church.

- ...They had leaders equipped by God.
- ...The church was mature in their faith.
- ...They were unified.
- ...They were attaining the full measure of the fullness of God.
- ...They understood right doctrine and were not deceived by wrong teaching.
- ...They spoke the truth in love.
- ...The Lord Jesus Christ was the Head.
- ...They were growing and being built up in love and in knowledge of the Son of God.
- ...Each member did his part.

This is a description of an amazing church. Jesus was the Head and they were mature, yet still growing and being built up in their faith and knowledge. I and many others would like to be part of a church like this.

A fundamental reason for their unity, maturity and spiritual growth is found in two key phrases in this passage. First, those who were part of this church were being "*prepared for works of service*" and second, "*each one was doing his part*".

Each member of this church was being "*prepared to serve*", and each person was "*doing his part*". In other words, each person, being led and empowered by the Spirit of God, was using the abilities God had given him to serve in the church. When this takes place, the church becomes the kind of church described in these verses.

This should help us understand the value and importance of spiritual gifts. *With God-given leaders and*

when each member does his part, using the gifts given him/her by the Spirit of God, the church becomes unified, mature, and is continually being built up. When only a few serve the Spirit of God is hindered and there will not be as much spiritual fruit and the church will be weaker. The church cannot mature or function as God designed it to function unless each member “does his part”, using the spiritual gifts given and empowered by the Spirit of God.

Biblical Teaching Relating to Spiritual Gifts

1 Corinthians 12 is too long of a passage to reproduce here, but before going through this section, it would be very helpful to read all of 1 Corinthians 12 several times. This is a key chapter relating to spiritual gifts. One cannot really understand what the Bible teaches about spiritual gifts without digesting this chapter first.

Following are two more key Scriptures relating to spiritual gifts:

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen. 1 Peter 4:10-11 (NIV)

For by the grace given to me I say to everyone among you not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think, but to think with sober judgment, each according to the measure of faith that God has assigned. For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness. Romans 12:3-8 (ESV)

Now we will look at key Biblical truths relating to spiritual gifts.

A. Even before we were born, God individually designed and formed us.

For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
Psalm 139:13 (NIV)

My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in your book before one of them came to be. Psalm 139:15-16 (NIV)

Even every one that is called by my name: for I have created him for my glory, I have formed him; yea, I have made him. Isaiah 43:7 (KJV)

Now the Word of the LORD came to me saying, “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, And before you were born I consecrated you; I have appointed you a prophet to the nations.” Jeremiah 1:4-5 (NASB)

While these passages are not referring to spiritual gifts, they clearly teach that God is the one who forms us and He has a plan and purpose for every person. No person is an accident of birth. We were created according to God’s own will and purpose and He has a plan and purpose for every person He creates. Our whole purpose and fulfillment in life is to know God and to serve Him in the capacity that He chose for us before we were born.

God has a purpose for every person, and when we make the choice to believe in Him, He then further equips us to serve Him and to do His will by giving us more specific spiritual gifts.

B. Every saved person has been given a spiritual gift.

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 1 Corinthians 12:7 (ESV)

Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it. 1 Corinthians 12:27 (NIV)

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. 1 Peter 4:10 (NIV)

...so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another.

Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them:...

Romans 12:5-6 (ESV)

Every Christian, no matter how insignificant he/she may feel, has individually been given a special ability or capacity to serve fellow members of the body. Every member of the body is needed.

C. It is the Spirit of God who gives spiritual gifts and places us in the body where He chooses for us to be.

But now God has placed the members, each one of them, in the body, just as He desired.

1 Corinthians 12:18 (NASB)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (ESV)

For we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body--whether Jews or Greeks, slave or free--and we were all given the one Spirit to drink. 1 Corinthians 12:13 (NIV)

All genuinely saved individuals are part of the body of Christ -- the church. There are many, many churches around the world. It is the Spirit of God that determines where we should serve and how we should serve. He equips us to serve in the manner that He determines for us to serve.

D. Spiritual gifts are not only given by God; their use is energized by the Spirit of God.

All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills. 1 Corinthians 12:11 (ESV)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (ESV)

The Spirit of God not only gives spiritual gifts; it is the Spirit who empowers us to use the gifts in such a way that they will accomplish God's own will and purpose. When we depend on our own knowledge and ability to do God's work, we will be weak with little, if any, spiritual fruit.

E. Spiritual gifts are given for the common good of other members of the body of Christ, not for personal gain.

As each has received a gift, use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God's varied grace: 1 Peter 4:10 (ESV)

But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
1 Corinthians 12:7 (NASB)

...that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another. 1 Corinthians 12:25 (ESV)

Spiritual gifts are given for us to serve fellow members of the body of Christ. No spiritual gift is given for us to exalt or build up ourselves. We grow and are built up and blessed as we use our gifts to serve others as God designed us to serve. Any attempt to use our gift in a way that results in self-glorification is not of God and is bound to produce little or no genuine spiritual fruit.

F. Every individual believer is needed and important to the body.

But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 1 Corinthians 12:20-22 (NASB)

...But God has combined the members of the body and has given greater honor to the parts that lacked it, so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other. 1 Corinthians 12:24b-25 (NIV)

There are some who feel that they don't have much value in the body of Christ. That is simply not true. Having or not having a particular gift is not an indication of value or spirituality. Every

person, even those who don't think they have a very significant gift, has an important role to play in the body. The body will suffer if that "unimportant" person does not do his/her part. God blesses and rewards our faithfulness, even when it may seem small and unimportant to us.

G. God asks us to be faithful, not flashy, prominent, or even "successful".

Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. 1 Corinthians 4:2 (KJV)

Every person receives a spiritual gift from God. He has entrusted us with that gift. Now He asks us to be faithful in the use of that gift. He does not say we will receive public recognition or fame, but He does promise to reward our faithfulness. God never promises that it will be easy. In fact, using your gift will most likely cost you something. It will be a sacrifice of time, energy, or even of finances; but when we are faithful, God will richly reward us.

H. The health of the body depends on the members using the abilities God gave them. When we do not use them, the whole body suffers.

But now there are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, "I have no need of you"; or again the head to the feet, "I have no need of you." On the contrary, it is much truer that the members of the body which seem to be weaker are necessary; 1 Corinthians 12:20-22 (NASB)

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Ephesians 4:11-12 (NASB)

From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work. Ephesians 4:16 (NIV)

God has so planned it that the church will not become a mature, unified, growing church unless each member does his/her part. When some do not serve, the whole body suffers because of it.

I. There is a tremendous variety in the gifts, in their use, and in the fruit produced from their use.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. 1 Corinthians 12:4-6 (ESV)

There is tremendous variety in the whole area of spiritual gifts. One who has the spiritual gift of teaching may be gifted to teach kindergartners, while another teacher may be gifted to teach adults who are new Christians, while still another may be gifted to teach seminary students. The seminary teacher probably would not do well at all teaching kindergartners. Someone with a gift

of mercy may do well in helping unwed mothers while another does well at helping those who have suffered a disaster, such as an earthquake. This principle is true of all the gifts and it is God who is in control of it all.

There is as much variety in the gifts as there are Christians. There are no two of us exactly alike. It is exciting for us to know that God made each one of us special and put us in a special place and gave us a special ability to serve Him in a special way. No one else is gifted quite like you are to do the work God has called you to do. Wow!!! Each one of us really does have an important role to play in the church, which is the body of Christ Himself.

J. Christians are equipped to use their gifts by being taught the Word of God.

And He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ; Ephesians 4:11-12 (NASB)

Today God calls and gifts some to be evangelists and pastor/teachers to equip God's people to serve the Lord. This results in the church being built up and brought to maturity and unity. This is extremely important in the life of a church.

2 Timothy 3:16-4:2 tells us how a pastor/teacher is to go about the work of equipping God's people for works of service.

All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work. In the presence of God and of Christ Jesus, who will judge the living and the dead, and in view of his appearing and his kingdom, I give you this charge: Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage--with great patience and careful instruction. 2 Timothy 3:16-4:2 (NIV)

To equip God's people to use their spiritual gift, an individual must be taught the Word of God, reproved, when necessary, corrected, encouraged and given careful instruction in living a godly life. When individuals are correctly taught the Word and they put it into practice, they will use their gifts and there will be much spiritual fruit. The church will be built up and become mature and unified. When the Word is not correctly taught, individuals will be weak and produce little spiritual fruit.

Gifts that Are Identified in Scripture

It is important to note that many of the gifts are strengths in an area or quality that all Christians are expected to have. For example, while some have the gift of faith, it is clear that all Christians are expected to live by faith. Some have a gift of helps; yet, we are all to serve each other. Some have the gift of exhortation; yet, all Christians are to give aid, comfort, and help to each other. Some have a gift of giving; yet, all Christians are to give.

The gifts often overlap each other. For example, the gifts of prophecy, teaching, and pastoring all involve teaching the Word; yet, each has its own emphasis.

The order in which the gifts are dealt with in the following pages is not an indication of their value or importance. All the gifts are very important and needed for a church to be what God designed a church to be. There is absolutely no way one could say one gift is more important than the others. Every one of them is needed for the church to be healthy.

Following are three key passages from the Word of God that tell us what various spiritual gifts are. The discussion of the gifts that follow is taken primarily from these three passages:

Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, each of us is to exercise them accordingly: if prophecy, according to the proportion of his faith; if service, in his serving; or he who teaches, in his teaching; or he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness.
Romans 12:6-8 (NASB)

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are varieties of ministries, and the same Lord. There are varieties of effects, but the same God who works all things in all persons. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, and to another the word of knowledge according to the same Spirit; to another faith by the same Spirit, and to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, and to another the effecting of miracles, and to another prophecy, and to another the distinguishing of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, and to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills. 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 (NASB)

It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.
Ephesians 4:11-13 (NIV)

A. Prophecy: Proclaiming the Word of God. 1 Corinthians 12:10, Romans 12:6

Prophecy is the ability to proclaim God's truth to others. Today, it would be similar to teaching or preaching the Word of God. Under the control of the Spirit of God, these individuals are to proclaim Jesus and the entire Word of God so that individuals will come to accept the Lord Jesus Christ and the body of Christ will be strengthened, encouraged, and comforted.

In the past, one with the gift of prophecy sometimes received new revelation from God and then spoke it to others. Today, with the completed Word of God, the emphasis is on proclaiming the Word of God rather than on receiving and teaching new revelations of truth from God.

B. Evangelist: One who preaches the gospel to unsaved people. Ephesians 4:11

An evangelist seems to have had an itinerant ministry, probably similar to what we would identify as a missionary. He was given the ability to lead individuals to the Lord. He went where the gospel had not been preached and where there were no churches. An evangelist leads people to the Lord, teaches them the fundamentals of the Word of God, turns the work over to a pastor, and then moves on to another unevangelized area.

C. Pastor or pastor/teacher: One who leads, teaches, and shepherds the church.
Ephesians 4:11

Recognizing the Lord Jesus Christ as the Chief Shepherd and the Head of the church, the pastor, being led and energized by the Spirit of God, leads the church. He does not “lord over the church” but sets an example of godly living and loves and cares for the church.

D. Teaching: Teaching the Word of God so that others can understand it and put it into practice.
Romans 12:7

A teacher is able to make the Word of God clear and understandable to those who know God. Those who hear are then able to apply the Word to their own lives and put it into practice. The teacher is able to systematically teach and apply the Word in such a way that those who hear are able to grow and mature in their walk with God.

Gifted teachers teach in many different situations. One may teach one other person while another may teach thousands. It can be a woman teaching a large group of women or a lady teaching a small group of children. It can be a father or mother teaching his/her children or a husband teaching his wife.

Pastors must be skilled teachers. That is one of the qualifications for being a pastor.
(Titus 1:9 and 1 Timothy 3:2)

E. Knowledge: The ability to study and understand the facts and truths of the Word of God.
Scholarship. 1 Corinthians 12:8

These individuals are able to academically search out and correctly understand Biblical truth. They are able to rightly determine sound Biblical doctrine and protect the body from false teaching. They are also responsible for things such as studying manuscripts and providing us with accurate copies of the Bible.

F. Wisdom: The ability to apply spiritual truth to life in a practical way. 1 Corinthians 12:8

These individuals have a solid understanding of spiritual truths and are able to lead and counsel others in how to put that truth into practice.

G. Discernment or distinguishing of spirits: The ability to discern what is from God and what is not. 1 Corinthians 12:10

Individuals with this gift have a God-given ability to determine whether a teaching is true or false, whether an individual is being led by the Spirit or some other spirit, whether an individual is sincere or a phony, whether he is spiritual or carnal, or whether a teaching is genuinely Biblical or from some other source.

People with the gift of discernment of spirits help to protect the church. They help to keep the genuine believers in ministries and they help to keep the false out.

H. Leadership or administration: The ability to lead. 1 Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:8

A believer with the gift of leadership is one who, by the Spirit of God, can see a spiritual need, formulate Biblical objectives and goals, and then motivate and lead others to assist in reaching those goals.

Remember, spiritual gifts are given and empowered by the Spirit of God. This is true of the gift of leadership. In the last few years there has been a proliferation of books which are designed to teach people how to be an effective ministry leader. Many of these are patterned after the world's concepts of success, or after someone who has been successful but who knows little about Biblical principles of leadership. Using the world's wisdom to accomplish spiritual goals, without Spirit-given direction, is full of danger. It often appeals to one's carnal desire for self-glorification.

While we can certainly learn from other people, if one has not been gifted by God to be a ministry leader, his leadership will result in little or no genuine spiritual fruit, no matter how much training he has had.

On the other hand, someone who is a Spirit-filled person who, by human standards, does not appear to be a leader, may be equipped by God to lead others in a productive fruitful ministry. Pastors, teachers, and elders all normally exercise a degree of leadership and some may be especially gifted leaders. Since pastors and elders are "overseers", it is hard to see how one could fulfill his duties without being a Spirit-led leader.

However, not all church leaders are a pastor or elder. There are gifted laymen who can give effective leadership in many areas of ministry within the church. However, these individuals must be careful that they lead under the direction of the pastors and elders whom God has called to oversee the church. They must not be a source of disunity or division in the church.

I. Helps or serving: Helping to carry a burden. 1 Corinthians 12:28, Romans 12:7

All Christians are to serve each other, but one with a gift of helps is especially called to help or serve those who need assistance. These are often people who do not receive much public recognition, but they are absolutely vital to a Biblical church. They are what the church and Christianity are all about. They often work "behind the scenes" keeping the church functioning as

God designed it to function. Often someone with the gift of helps takes a big burden off the shoulders of the those in leadership positions by pitching in and helping in areas where they can give valuable assistance. They are a major blessing to the church.

J. Exhortation: The ability to come along side of someone and help them. Romans 12:8

An individual with the gift of exhortation is able to understand how another person functions or feels and then gives the appropriate encouragement, comfort, help, or counsel. He may or may not be a teacher or pastor, but he has the ability to strengthen fellow believers.

It is interesting to note that the root word for exhortation is the same word used of the Holy Spirit in John 14 and 16. The Spirit comes along beside us to help us. Sometimes He may use a person with the gift of exhortation to come along beside us to strengthen and encourage us.

K. Showing mercy: Compassion for those who suffer. Romans 12:8

These individuals have a special place in their heart for those who suffer or who are in unfortunate circumstances. They are able to love and comfort them. The Christian life is not easy and we will all go through some deep valleys. When we do, those with the gift of mercy will recognize it and come along beside us.

There is an apparently true story of a little girl who went to school and found out that her best friend's mother had died. The little girl's mother asked her what she said to her friend. The little girl replied, "Oh, I didn't say anything. I just went over to her desk and sat down beside her and cried with her". That little girl illustrates the gift of mercy.

L. Giving: Giving of one's possessions to help others. Romans 12:8

All Christians are to give, but God has gifted some with the ability and the desire to give above and beyond what most Christians are able to give. Their motive for giving is not for recognition, but to promote the work of God.

Giving can extend beyond money. It can be food, clothes, money, time, energy, sharing your home or whatever is needed by another member of the body of Christ.

M. Faith: A supernatural ability to believe and depend on God. 1 Corinthians 12:9

These individuals have the ability to trust God in difficult circumstances. Their lives are characterized by answered prayer. Their faith encourages and inspires others to trust in God.

Their faith can inspire the church to launch new ministries, trusting God to faithfully provide.

Without these people of faith, the church could very well stagnate. We need men and women of faith.

In addition to the gifts mentioned above, there are four miraculous sign gifts: miracles, healing, tongues (languages), and the interpretation of tongues (languages). In Christian circles there is spirited disagreement as to the validity of these gifts for today. I personally take the position that these gifts were primarily for use in the early church times and their purpose was to confirm the Word being preached and to authenticate the apostles. That is not saying that God will never heal or do other kinds of miracles today. He still does, and this writer has twice been healed of viral encephalitis.

A Story, “A Rabbit on the Swim Team”

The following story, whose source is unknown to this writer, illustrates the importance of each one doing what God has equipped us to do.

Once upon a time, the animals decided they should do something meaningful to meet the problems of the world. So, they organized a school.

They adopted an activity curriculum of running, climbing, swimming and flying. To make it easier to administer the curriculum, all the animals took all the subjects.

The *duck* was excellent in swimming; in fact, better than his instructor. But he made only passing grades in flying, and was very poor in running. Since he was slow in running, he had to drop swimming and stay after school to practice running. This caused his web feet to be badly worn, so that he was only average in swimming. But average was quite acceptable, so nobody worried about that—except the duck.

The *rabbit* started at the top of his class in running, but developed a nervous twitch in his leg muscles because of so much make-up work in swimming.

The *squirrel* was excellent in climbing, but he encountered constant frustration in flying class because his teacher made him start from the ground up instead of from the treetop down. He developed “charlie horses” from overexertion, and so only got a C in climbing and a D in running.

The *eagle* was a problem student and was severely disciplined for being a non-conformist. In climbing classes, he beat all the others to the top of the tree, but insisted on using his own way to get there.

The obvious moral of the story is a simple one—each creature has its own set of capabilities in which it will naturally excel—unless it is expected or forced to fill a mold that doesn’t fit. When that happens, frustration, discouragement, and even guilt brings overall mediocrity or complete defeat. A duck is a duck—and *only* a duck. It is built to swim, not to run and certainly not to climb. A squirrel is a squirrel—and *only* that. To move it out of its forte, climbing, and then expect it to

swim or fly will drive a squirrel nuts. Eagles are beautiful creatures in the air but not in a foot race. The rabbit will win every time unless, of course, the eagle gets hungry.

What is true of creatures in the forest is true of Christians in the family. God has not made us all the same. He never intended to. It was He who planned and designed the differences, unique capabilities, and variations in the Body.

Frequently Asked Questions

When the topic of spiritual gifts is discussed, there are often questions which arise that are not clearly answered by the Scriptures. Good Bible scholars sometimes disagree on the answers. The following answers reflect the opinions of Phil Benedict, the writer of this study:

A. How do I know what my spiritual gift is?

As you begin to serve the Lord, it will become more evident what your gifts are. You will enjoy serving in the area where God has gifted you, and, generally speaking, there will be good results from your service. It may be helpful to consult with a more mature Christian individual who knows you and may be able to give you some good advice. Overall, do what seems most natural for you. You don't need to spend much effort trying to find out what your spiritual gift is. It will naturally come out. As you grow and mature in the Lord, your service will become more and more effective and productive, and more enjoyable.

Some have developed "tests" with a series of questions for you to answer that are designed to help you determine what your gift is. At times, these may be helpful; however, they can also be misleading. Overall, just do what the Spirit of God leads or prompts you to do. Remember, it is the Spirit that gives and empowers the gifts. The Spirit will lead you into the area of service where He has equipped you to serve.

B. Do we have just one spiritual gift or more than one gift?

It seems that, while all of us have a primary gift, many have more than one. Some of the gifts are similar and it seems as if it would be hard to be gifted in one area without having the qualities that are inherent in a related gift. For example, the gifts of helps, mercy, and exhortation all have to do with encouraging, comforting, and building up fellow Christians. It seems that if an individual has one of these gifts, he is also gifted in the other two. The same is true of a pastor/teacher, teacher, and leader. An effective pastor also has to be a capable teacher and leader.

C. Are there spiritual gifts that are not mentioned in these passages?

It seems that there are. There are many ways to serve that do not seem to neatly fit into one of these categories. A musician, for example, can be a tremendous blessing to the church, but music

is not mentioned as one of the gifts.

D. Are we supposed to seek a certain gift or gifts?

Unquestionably we are to grow and mature in our walk with God. We are told to pursue love and to diligently develop certain qualities. (2 Peter 1:2-11) As we grow in our walk with God, we develop new skills and God often leads us in new avenues of service. If God leads into a new avenue of service, He will equip you for that service. Yet, we are never told to seek any particular gift. If you sense that God is leading you in a certain way, then pursue that direction unless God definitely closes the door. Romans 1:11, 1 Timothy 4:14, and 2 Timothy 1:6 all give some insight into this question.

E. Should I seek the gift of “speaking in tongues”?

In some Christian circles it is taught that every saved person should “speak in tongues”. A few go so far as to teach that you are not saved unless you do. Many say that to be “filled with the Spirit” is to speak in tongues. Many will say that if you don’t speak in tongues, you may be a Christian but not a very good one, and you are certainly not filled with the Spirit. These teachings are all false to the core.

Often those who teach these things have a tremendous amount of pride and consider themselves to be spiritually superior to those who do not “speak in tongues”. All of this is based on false Biblical teaching. Don’t get caught up in it. It is not what the Bible teaches. There is no instruction given in the Bible for Christians to seek to “speak in tongues”. In fact, just the opposite is clearly taught.

Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
1 Corinthians 12:4-7 (ESV)

Conclusion

As Christians, we all know that God loves and cares for us. However, God knew that we also needed each other. It is a major blessing to know that we are part of God’s family of believers and that this family of believers here on earth also accepts and loves us. As we receive love and acceptance, and we reciprocate with love, acceptance, and forgiveness for our fellow believers. Together we love, encourage, build up, and, when needed, we admonish and even rebuke one another. And together we grow and mature and are one in our faith and in our love, service and devotion for our Lord. Our deepest needs are met and we can have peace, be satisfied, and enjoy life – even when we go through trials and difficult times. It doesn’t get any better than that!!! Jesus prayed that His followers would be one, just as He and the Father are one. This is more than just a theological truth. The Word of God instructs genuine believers in how to make it a practical reality. When this happens, the world takes notice and is drawn to the Lord Jesus Christ.

God is glorified and we are richly blessed.

God did not design us to be spiritual hermits. We function together as a family. Each genuinely saved person is needed and has an important role in the body of Christ. We need each other. To isolate from other believers is to bring on unhappiness and defeat in our Christian life, and we short change others by not encouraging and building them up. s