



Fellowship

Why Christians need to take time to be with each other.

Proverbs 27:17 - As iron sharpens iron, so a man sharpens the countenance of his friend.

What does this verse mean?

Fellowship among friends improves each one.

What does countenance mean?

Bearing, demeanor, mental composure... bearing or expression that offers approval or sanction, moral support.

Why is a sharpened countenance important for the Christian?

We live in a world that is very discouraging since it is against the One whom we represent. We need our batteries charged by being with those who are like-minded.

How does iron sharpen iron?

The picture here is two iron swords being rubbed together to sharpen the blade of each. This process knocks off the rough spots and hones the dull places.

How does this analogy apply to friends improving each other?

As the iron blades have to be in contact with each other, so do friends in order to be encouraged. For encouragement to happen, communication needs to take place. Communication also enables each one to learn something from the other. As this interaction causes improvements to be added and flaws to be taken away, this is the honing of the dull spots and the knocking off of the rough places.

Does Proverbs 27:17 apply to Christians only or to non-believers as well?

It applies to any combination of believers and unbelievers because it only addresses interaction on a human level...

- Certainly a Christian can be an encouragement to a non-believer which God can use to make them into an eternally useful tool.
- Witnessing to a non believer can even encourage the believer... defending the faith should strengthen your faith as you see there really are good answers to the skeptics.
- The interaction between two non-believers can be an encouragement to each other but their improvement is only temporal (in a worldly sense). Note that this is because truth is universal!

What do we call communication between Christians?

Fellowship which means companionship, a relation in which parties hold something in common, familiar interaction.

What do Christians hold in common?

Many things but most notably a relationship with Jesus Christ.

So what should Christians communicate with each other about as part of their fellowship with each other?

Many things but most notably what they've seen Jesus doing in their life and the lives of others.

What are some examples of sharing what you've seen Jesus doing in your life or the lives of others?

- Answer to prayer – like the tree I cut down falling right where it needed to fall.
- Good fortune beyond coincidence – like our engine stalling so that we could notice air escaping from our truck tire at Panther Junction.
- People's lives changed – like Kathy Barger's testimony of how the Lord took away her desire to smoke.
- Your own testimony – how God used prophecy to lead me to Christ.

How is it encouraging to hear about what Jesus is doing in the lives of others?

It reinforces and builds up our faith.

Who do Christians have fellowship with?

Certainly with each other...

I Jn 1:7 - 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.

But not with unbelievers...

2 Cor 6:14 - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

- Believers are called to interact with non-believers in order to lead them to Christ but we can not have true fellowship with them because this involves sharing Christ which they lack.
- Note that there is a difference in potential depth of relationship that I'd characterize as the difference between true companionship versus more of an "acquaintancy."

We also have fellowship with God the Father and God the Son...

I Jn 1:3 - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

As well as God the Holy Spirit...

2 Cor 13:14 - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all. Amen.

Why is fellowship with God important?

Fellowship with God is essential for fruitfulness...

John 15:4-5 – “Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing.”

If we are not bearing fruit of the Spirit in our lives we need to question if we really have a relationship with God at all.

What is the fruit we must bear if we are saved?

- Others being saved.
- Also, the fruit of the Spirit...
Gal 5:22-23 - But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.

What is the fruit of the Spirit?

Attitudes and emotions which help us get through any circumstances in this world. This in turn bears eternal fruit because it leads to other people being saved.

Besides encouraging one another with testimonies about Jesus, what else should Christian fellowship include?

Confession of sin to each other and prayers for each other...

James 5:16 - Confess your trespasses to one another, and pray for one another, that you may be healed. The effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much.

Why is confession of sin a necessary part of Christian fellowship?

- We still have our old sin nature.
- It breaks down barriers between people... openness about the most painful things in a person's life cultivates an atmosphere of free exchange.
- It enables others to help us through accountability.
- It enables others to demonstrate love, grace, mercy, and forgiveness as God has done to us.

Why is prayer for each other important?

- Because “effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man avails much” – God responds to prayer, it is an important aspect of our relationship with Him.
- We need prayer and we are commanded to do it.
- It is a natural part of loving one another.

- It enables us to participate in what God is doing in the lives of others.

What is the result of the encouragement that comes from Christian fellowship?

There is more of what we were saved to do, represent Jesus on earth and do good works...

Heb 10:24-25 - And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

What does it mean to exhort one another?

To incite by argument or advice, urge strongly, issue warnings, make urgent appeals.

What does exhortation do?

- It builds us up making us more effective in the world to do what God has called us to do.
- It encourages us as we grow in the Lord and find that we are of one mind in the church.

How do we exhort one another?

By helping each other understand how the Bible applies to their situation...

2 Tim 3:16-17 - All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

It is the understanding of God's Word which sharpens the dull spots and knocks off the rough spots.

What reason does Hebrews 10:24-25 give for why we should not forsake our meeting together and exhorting each other?

- As we see things going on in the world which remind us that the day the Lord will return is growing closer.
- Note that this verse says we can see the Day of the Lord approaching (not that we can know the Day but that there will be signs that indicate the Day is near).
- I see Israel back in the promised land as a nation, the yielding of national sovereignty to world governmental institutions, and the rapid growth of technology as key signs that the time is ripe for the Lord's return.

For fellowship to happen between Christians, what must happen?

They need to get together.

What is the Lord's desire regarding our fellowship with each other?

It is His will, indeed Christ prayed that His people might have fellowship with each other...

John 17:21 – “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.”

Did Jesus ever pray for anything that didn't happen?

No... the unity of the church is a certainty so having fellowship together is not optional, it is natural. This is why it is true that, "not all in church are Christians, but all Christians are in church." People who claim to be a Christian but are not involved in church are deceiving themselves...

John 13:35 - "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

If you love someone, you will want to be with them. This is a sure sign of being saved, having a sincere desire to be involved in church...

1 Jn 3:14 - We know that we have passed from death to life, because we love the brethren. He who does not love his brother abides in death.

Just being present with fellow Christians is an encouragement to them. Even showing up demonstrates your love for them...

1 Cor 8:1 - love edifies.

How is our fellowship together an ordinance of the church?

We are commanded to observe the Lord's Supper.

1 Cor 11:24-25 - and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me."

Why did the Lord command us to observe the Lord's Supper?

Because remembering what Jesus did for us is central to our faith. Note that it is necessary for us to come together and to remember what Jesus did for us to observe the Lord's Supper. This is Christian fellowship, the be together and remember the Lord with one another.

How is giving for missions work an act of fellowship?

It is a great encouragement to those who receive the gift...

2 Cor 8:1-4

1 Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:

2 that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.

3 For I bear witness that according to their ability, yes, and beyond their ability, they were freely willing,

4 imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Any time we gave sacrificially of ourselves, we imitate our heavenly Father who gave His only begotten Son for our benefit.

What things shouldn't Christian break fellowship over?

Christians should not break fellowship over what Paul calls doubtful things (NKJV) or disputable matters (NIV - Romans 14:1).

Rom 14:1 - Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.

There are many beliefs that are not central to our faith which we should tolerate amongst ourselves and not allow these things to break our fellowship...

Rom 15:1-2 - We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification.

As Hank Haanagraf would say we should debate these things vigorously recognizing their acceptance within the pale of orthodoxy but not divide over them. For example: the order of the events related to the Lord's return and the role of sign gifts such as tongues.

What things should Christians divide over?

- Christians should divide over false doctrine that is central to our faith, generally about who Jesus Christ is and what He did for us: His Almighty divine nature, virgin birth, death atoning for our sins, resurrection, return, authority of Scripture, etc.
- Note that apostasy is growing in our day as more professing Christians reject the fundamental truths that Christians must believe if they are saved.

For more about why Christians need to spend time with each other, study:

Eph 4:11-16

11 And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers,

12 for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, 13 till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ;

14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting,

15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head-- Christ--

16 from whom the whole body, joined and knit together by what every joint supplies, according to the effective working by which every part does its share, causes growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love.