

Lesson 13 27 April 2014

Vibrant Christian Fellowship

Lesson Scope: 1 Corinthians 15:58 and 1 Corinthians 16

Lesson Focus

At the conclusion of his first epistle to the Corinthians, Paul noted some ways each member could build Christian fellowship. Within the local congregation and in the church at large, each member can contribute to the good of the others. Material possessions can be shared with those in need. Leaders and other church workers can benefit from our support.

The rich blessing of close-knit fellowship is possible through the diligent effort and personal involvement of each member. Selfless devotion to God and fervent love for the brotherhood bring vibrancy to the fellowship. Neglect and indifference, even in small things, can destroy fellowship.

The church is not a machine whose wheels turn mindlessly; doing the work its Inventor designed it to do. It is made of living souls who choose to serve the God who made them. Working together like the members of the human body, they fulfill God's plan for the church.

This study has an immediate, personal application to every church member. None should feel that their sphere of influence is so insignificant that the little they can do does not count. Each member has a place in the fellowship. Motivate yourself and others to make a positive contribution to their congregation.

It is also pointed out that each one should appreciate the contribution of others in the church; their work should not be taken for granted. Paul wrote words of commendation for those whose unselfish labors had refreshed his spirit and others' (1 Corinthians 16:18).

The church of Jesus Christ is a "body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth." Charity, "the bond of perfectness," unites this body in faith and practice.

Lesson Aim: To see how Christians should fill their places in the church fellowship.

Theme Verses: [Philippians 2:1-2](#). If there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

Lesson Text

Abounding in the Lord's Work

[1 Corinthians 15:58](#) ⁵⁸ Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord. [1 Corinthians 16:1-9](#) ¹ Now concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye. ² Upon the first *day* of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as *God* hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come. ³ And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by *your* letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem. ⁴ And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me. ⁵ Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia: for I do pass through Macedonia. ⁶ And it may be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go. ⁷ For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit. ⁸ But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. ⁹ For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and *there are* many adversaries.

Following Noble Examples

[1 Corinthians 16:10-18](#) ¹⁰ Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also *do*. ¹¹ Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren. ¹² As touching *our* brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren: but his will was not at all to come at this time; but he will come when he shall have convenient time. ¹³ Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong. ¹⁴ Let all your things be done with charity. ¹⁵ I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and *that* they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) ¹⁶ That ye submit yourselves

unto such, and to every one that helpeth with *us*, and laboureth. ¹⁷ I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. ¹⁸ For they have refreshed my spirit and yours: therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.

Bonding in True Brotherhood

1 Corinthians 16:19-24 ¹⁹ The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house. ²⁰ All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss. ²¹ The salutation of *me* Paul with mine own hand. ²² If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maranatha. ²³ The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ *be* with you. ²⁴ My love *be* with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Questions for Study

Abounding in the Lord's Work

1. What blessings result from zealous labor for the Lord?
2. What principles should guide our giving?
3. How can church building succeed in spite of many adversaries?

Following Noble Examples

4. How could the Corinthians carry out Paul's admonition regarding Timothy?
5. What qualities of character are essential for maintaining vibrant Christian fellowship?
6. What are some evidences that persons are devoted to the ministry of the saints?

Bonding in True Brotherhood

7. How does the holy kiss promote and strengthen brotherhood?
8. How do we apply the principle "Let him be Anathema"?

Analyzing the Passage

Abounding (1 Corinthians 15:58) means "without bounds or limits." Knowing that our "labour is not in vain in the Lord" should be an incentive to put forth every effort we can give to the Lord's work. Stedfast and unmoveable describe ongoing stability and sustained effort.

Paul directed that the collection (1 Corinthians 16:1) be gathered before his arrival, so that the giving would be done voluntarily, not under the

impulse of an emotional appeal. One should be careful to avoid giving for the sake of a good image.

Paul considered himself part of a team of workers. In 1 Corinthians 16:4 he said, "They shall go with me." Of Timotheus, Paul stated, "He worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do" (1 Corinthians 16:10). Working in conjunction with others was a blessing to him.

Charity (1 Corinthians 16:14) refers to what Paul wrote in chapter 13. Charity includes sensitivity to the various personalities and preferences of others. Paul wrote with appreciation for the labors of his brothers and sisters. He viewed church work as a team effort, not the work of one man only.

The house of Stephanas had addicted (1 Corinthians 16:15) themselves, not to strong drink or drugs, but to a habitual ministry to the saints. Serving others had become a fulfilling way of life for them.

Anathema (1 Corinthians 16:22), meaning "accursed," is untranslated here. Maranatha is from two Aramaic words meaning "the Lord is coming."

Principles and Applications

Abounding in the Lord's Work

1. The hope of the resurrection motivates the believer to personal stability and zealous service for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). The sacrifice and effort expended in the Lord's work will not be in vain. There is no limit to the good one can do for God. The results of this work reach into eternity.

2. Systematic giving for the Lord's work both expresses and builds Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:1-4). Even the widow who gave just two mites was commended for doing her part. Though her gift was smaller than what many others were able to give, her love for others was large. It was voluntary and sacrificial.

3. Faithful leaders long for fellowship with all the brethren (1 Corinthians 16:5-7). Paul was eager to be with the brethren because of the inspiration they brought to him. He took an interest in their work, because he and they were involved in the same cause. Their zeal inspired him.

We can lend a hand to help a burdened brother or sister. We can offer prayer support when others share their disappointments and struggles. Such sharing benefits the giver and the receiver.

4. Both opportunity in church building and opposition to it should move the Christian to expend his best efforts for the cause (1 Corinthians 16:8-9). All of us can find ways to serve effectively right where we are. Paul decided to tarry at Ephesus because he had found an open door there. He did not allow fear of the adversaries to keep him from serving. He understood that the adversaries also needed to hear the Gospel. He had once been a persecutor and an adversary of the church himself.

Following Noble Examples

5. Every Christian should appreciate and respect those who work "the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 16:10-12, 15-18). We should encourage those who are serving where we ourselves do not have an opportunity. Rather than merely standing by and watching for mistakes as they go about their work, we should strengthen them by our loving support. Others may not do the work as we would have done it. We must not intimidate those who are less capable but who are willing to do their best.

6. Watchfulness, stability, and love are essential qualities for maintaining vibrant Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:13-14). These are qualities every believer can and should possess. We fill our places best when we have God's love in our hearts. We show our love for the brethren by being stable and by giving them a noble example to follow. Brethren who are strong in the Lord form a nucleus of fellowship that nurtures the weak.

Bonding in True Brotherhood

7. Close communication with believers from other areas adds an important dimension to Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:19-20). Churches benefit from association with believers of like faith in other communities. This is especially true for congregations located some distance from the nearest sister congregation. Small, isolated churches appreciate visits from fellow believers in more-populated areas.

8. The practice of the holy kiss both expresses and fosters vibrant Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:20). This ordinance aids Christian fellowship. It can, however, become a formality to which we give little thought. When we greet a brother or sister, let us cultivate a warm manner that conveys a genuine spirit of love. Avoid careless or awkward

maneuvers. In that way the one receiving our greeting does not have to dread meeting us but can feel blessed by our gesture of charity. The holy kiss will continue to be a blessing as long as it is reserved for those of like faith.

The embrace is not a scripturally approved substitute for the Christian salutation. Tolerating it will quickly blur fellowship lines, and before long it will be practiced between genders.

9. In light of Jesus' Second Coming, the church must maintain careful discipline (1 Corinthians 16:22). Church discipline becomes increasingly important as Jesus' Second Coming approaches. In a time when many professing Christians are departing from the teachings of the New Testament, the true church must safeguard herself by avoiding fellowship with them. Clear fellowship lines help us maintain the moral boundaries that the Scriptures have established for us.

10. Only through "the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ" can we maintain vibrant Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:22-23). Maintaining vibrant Christian fellowship is not automatic. By God's grace we are granted the privilege of fellowship in the church. We need the grace of God all through life, not just at the beginning or in times of dire need.

Important Teachings

1. The hope of the resurrection motivates the believer to personal stability and zealous service for the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58).
2. Systematic giving for the Lord's work both expresses and builds Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:1-4).
3. Faithful leaders long for fellowship with all the brethren (1 Corinthians 16:5-7).
4. Both opportunity in church building and opposition to it should move the Christian to expend his best efforts for the cause (1 Corinthians 16:8-9).
5. Every Christian should appreciate and respect those who work "the work of the Lord" (1 Corinthians 16:10-12, 15-18).
6. Watchfulness, stability, and love are essential qualities for maintaining vibrant Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:13-14).
7. Close communication with believers from other areas adds an important dimension to Christian fellowship (1 Corinthians 16:19-20).
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Answers to Questions

1. What blessings result from zealous labor for the Lord?

We can have joy because we are vessels God can use in this work. We rejoice to see others grow spiritually as a result of our work on their behalf. We will realize future blessings when we hear God's words of commendation "Well done, thou good and faithful servant: ... enter thou into the joy of thy lord" (Matthew 25:21).

2. What principles should guide our giving?

We should give regularly ("upon the first day of the week"). Everyone should give something ("Let every one of you lay by him in store"). The gift should be proportionate to one's income ("as God hath prospered him"). The amounts given should not become common knowledge.

3. How can church building succeed in spite of many adversaries?

God's power is able to give success despite adversaries. The work of adversaries draws public attention to the believers and tests them in ways that demonstrate the power of the Gospel. The church often grows more rapidly under persecution than under tolerance.

4. How could the Corinthians carry out Paul's admonition regarding Timothy?

They could give him a warm welcome and let him know they were glad for his coming. They could show him as much respect as they showed Paul, because they labored in the same work. They could work peaceably with him, avoiding strife and contention.

5. What qualities of character are essential for maintaining vibrant Christian fellowship?

Among these qualities are watchfulness to guard the fellowship from those things that would destroy it, personal steadfastness in the faith, courage to stand for truth, charity toward all the brethren, respect for the work of others, and willingness to aid financially and to share words of support.

6. What are some evidences that persons are devoted to the ministry of

the saints?

They show genuine concern for the needs of their brethren and readily get involved in helping them. They give when their brethren experience an accident or a loss. They sympathize in times of sickness or death. They refresh the spirits of the downcast.

7. How does the holy kiss promote and strengthen brotherhood?

It is an expression of mutual love. It shows respect, acceptance, and appreciation. It should be used with all the brethren, not just a select few of our closest friends.

8. How do we apply the principle "Let him be Anathema"?

As Jesus' Second Coming approaches and many professing Christians depart from the faith, we must refuse fellowship with those who fail to love and obey our Lord Jesus. We endanger the fellowship and our own salvation when we try to include such persons.

Summarizing the Lesson

We all admire and appreciate vibrant Christian fellowship. It inspires us to keep on living the Christian life. It motivates us to involve ourselves gladly in church work. It moves us to share our material blessings with needy brethren.

Keeping fellowship vibrant should be a high priority. Each member has a part in this. Let us edify each other, keep the practice of the holy kiss alive, and guard our personal lives. Without such effort this priceless fellowship will be lost.

Research Guide

1. Read Romans 16 for additional examples of Paul's appreciation for others who labored with him in the work of the Lord.
2. Using a concordance, read the verses in which the word fellowship is used in the New Testament Epistles.