

Our Life Together



A Study In Christian Fellowship

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Our Life Together

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The outlines were developed in the course of my ministry as a preacher of the gospel. Feel free to use them as they are, or adapt them to suit your own personal style. To God be the glory!

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Our Life Together

A Call To Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. In **Ac 2:42**, we have this account of the early church:

“And they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

2. Today, many churches place great importance to being true to the Word of God, observing the Lord’s Supper, and being fervent in prayer
3. These things are certainly important, but what of “fellowship”?
 - a. Do we properly understand this facet of the Lord's church?
 - b. Are we practicing it in a way consistent with the example of the early church?
4. Beginning with this lesson...
 - a. I want to examine the subject of “fellowship” in the light of the Scriptures
 - b. With the objective in mind of ensuring a proper understanding and application of this Biblical subject

[Let's start by first noticing...]

I. THE PROBLEM OF SELF-CENTEREDNESS

A. AS OFTEN MANIFESTED IN A LOCAL CONGREGATION..

1. What if an observer came to make a careful analysis of the church’s life in reference to fellowship?
 - a. Someone who was a specialist in studying how groups work together
 - b. Who intended to compare us with other groups that have some sort of interaction among its members (like civic clubs, garden clubs, etc.)
 - c. Who would examine such things like:
 - 1) How we relate to one another when we assemble for worship
 - 2) How we interact with each other away from our assemblies
 - 3) Our group loyalties
 - 4) Our willingness to support each other in time of need
 - 5) The amount of time we spend in the company of others in the church
 - d. I.e., seeking to learn how well those who sit by each other during the assembly Sunday after Sunday really know each other
-- What would we expect him to discover?
2. Several years ago, some churches allowed themselves to be analyzed in this way; here is what was discovered:
 - a. The great majority of members knew a very small percentage of the people

- b. Those who gathered for worship were mostly an anonymous group of worshippers
 - c. They were not a genuine community of souls prepared to bear one another's burdens
 - d. They expressed little interest in becoming more involved in each other's lives
 - e. I.e., they came to worship only for the sake of their own spiritual life and personal salvation!
- It was said, **“Many go to church as they would go to the movie theater”**
- 3. The bottom line was this:
 - a. The churches that were analyzed consisted of members who were **“self-centered”**
 - b. Therefore, very little fellowship of any sort was taking place!

[Please do not jump to conclusions. I am not suggesting that the same condition exists here. For the most part, I think it does not. But as we grow in number, the potential is there for losing the kind of fellowship we should experience. The purpose of this study is to ward off the kind of “self-centeredness” which can destroy the spiritual fellowship God would have us experience in the church.]

B. SOME REASONS FOR "SELF-CENTEREDNESS" IN CHURCHES...

- 1. Most of us lived through the **“Me Decade”**
 - a. The 1970's, viewed as being distinguished by self-centered attitudes and self-indulgent behavior
 - b. A time in which there was...
 - 1) A rapid rise of crime against others - rape, theft, assault, murder
 - 2) An increased use of drugs and alcohol as a way of escape
 - 3) A turn to philosophies and religions which involve preoccupation with self:
 - a) **“Looking Out For #1”**
 - b) Transcendental Meditation (TM) and Yoga
 - 4) An emphasis on consumerism and materialistic gain
 - c. A decade followed by the **“Greed Decade”** (the 1980's)
 - Such cultural trends have produced many self-centered people!
- 2. We live in a highly mobile society
 - a. New families move in, and others move away
 - b. Many live great distances from the place of worship and from each other
 - c. These facts do not prevent us from having proper fellowship, they just make it easier to become isolated from the fellowship unintentionally
- 3. Technology designed to bring us closer together, can easily move us apart
 - a. Phones, e-mail, etc., greatly increase our ability to communicate
 - b. But we can become stretched out so thin through such technology that we do not develop any meaningful relationships
- 4. A failure to appreciate the Biblical teaching about **“Our Life Together”**

[It is this last point that I want to expand upon in this lesson. While societal trends may be nourishing the spirit of self-centeredness, I believe God has designed the church to point us in a different direction...]

II. THE CHURCH: A FELLOWSHIP FREE FROM SELF-CENTEREDNESS

A. THIS TRUTH “EMPHASIZED” IN THE APOSTLES’ DOCTRINE...

1. We are to be hospitable to one another - **1 Pe 4:9**
2. We are to have a care for one another - **1 Co 12:26**
3. We are to pray for one another - **Ja 5:16**
4. We are to restore one another - **Ja 5:19-20**
5. We are to teach and admonish one another - **Co 3:16**
6. We are to serve one another in love - **Ga 5:13**

B. THIS TRUTH “EXEMPLIFIED” IN THE EARLY CHURCH...

1. By the church in Jerusalem - **Ac 2:42-46**
2. By the church in Antioch - **Ac 11:27-30**
3. By the churches in Macedonia - **2 Co 8:1-5**
4. By the churches in Achaia - **Ro 15:26**

C. SUCH FELLOWSHIP IS A NATURAL CONSEQUENCE OF THE TEACHING OF CHRIST...

1. The kingdom consists of those who love both God and their brethren - **Mk 12:28-34**
2. Thus the fellowship we are to enjoy in the church is both “**vertical**” and “**horizontal**”
 - a. With God...
 - 1) We enjoy a “vertical” relationship - cf. **2 Co 5:20**
 - 2) An overemphasis on this aspect can cause insensitivity to the needs of others
 - b. With fellow Christians...
 - 1) We enjoy a “horizontal” relationship - cf. **Ep 2:14-16**
 - 2) Of course, an undue emphasis on this aspect may cause one to neglect God

CONCLUSION

1. Lessons to follow will define further...
 - a. The fellowship that is to be enjoyed by those in the church
 - b. The spiritual activities designed to nurture fellowship in the body of Christ
 - c. Elements necessary to preserve our fellowship
 - d. Biblical limitations on the extent of our fellowship
2. But in this lesson I have sought to stress...
 - a. The importance of fellowship in the local church
 - b. The danger of allowing “self-centeredness” to disrupt our fellowship
3. For now, here are some practical suggestions that will enhance our ability to provide the proper fellowship:
 - a. Learn the names of **every** member (make use of the church directory!)
 - b. Take notice of the cares and the joys of fellow Christians (listen to the announcements!)
 - c. Pray for those with special needs, mentioning them by name in your private prayers
 - d. Allow yourself to have...
 - 1) An “**approachable personality**” (where people feel comfortable in your presence)
 - 2) A “**transparent lifestyle**” (where you are not afraid to let others know the “real you”)

Our Life Together

An Intimate Household

INTRODUCTION

1. In our previous lesson, we...
 - a. Brought up the question as to whether churches today are engaged in the type of fellowship practiced by churches in the NT
 - b. Asked questions as to whether churches today:
 - 1) Are communities of believers expressing a sense of concern for one another
 - 2) Or if they are simply groups of "anonymous" worshippers
 - c. Considered:
 - 1) Factors in our society which tempt us to be self-centered
 - 2) How an attitude of self-centeredness is foreign to the very basics of Christ's teachings
2. In this lesson, I wish to examine more carefully...
 - a. The teaching of Christ concerning the nature of the church He said He would build
 - b. And how His teaching ought to shape the type of fellowship He wanted the members of His church to experience

[As we begin, let's consider some contrasting views of the church...]

I. DIFFERENT VIEWS OF THE CHURCH

A. HOW MODERN MAN TENDS TO VIEW THE CHURCH...

1. As an **“institution”**, as an **“organization”**
 2. Terms which are analogies of some business or corporation
 3. Thus we find terms frequently used like:
 - a. “Associate Minister”
 - b. “Superintendent Of Education”
 - c. “Director Of Music”
- **While the church was divinely instituted by God, and does have some organization, it seems many have molded the local church into a businesslike structure**

B. JESUS VIEWED THE CHURCH DIFFERENTLY...

1. He viewed it as a **“family”** who would be doing the will of His Father in heaven - **Mt 12:46-50**; cf. **7:21**
2. Indeed, both Jesus and His apostles often used the “family” motif in speaking of the church
 - a. Jesus would speak of...
 - 1) God as His Father - **Jn 2:16**
 - 2) His followers as family relatives
 - 3) And teach His disciples to address God as our “Father” - **Mt 6:9**
 - b. The apostles referred to the church...
 - 1) As a “brotherhood” - **1 Pe 2:17**

2) As the “house (family) of God” - **1 Ti 3:15; 2 Co 6:17-18**

[And so the church Jesus established was to be “**An Intimate Household**”, allowing a closeness not usually found in “organizations” or “institutions.”

In fact, every aspect of the life of God's people is to manifest the closeness of family intimacy...]

II. HOW FAMILY INTIMACY IS TO PERMEATE CHURCH LIFE

A. IN OUR “RELATIONSHIP” WITH EACH OTHER...

1. We are to be like little children - **Mt 18:1-4**
2. Not striving for dominance over each other
 - a. But with humility, showing submissiveness
 - b. And with dependence upon one another

B. IN OUR “CONCERN” FOR EACH OTHER...

1. Concerned with protecting the members of our family from harm (esp. spiritual harm) - **Mt 18:5-7**
2. As concerned with the one who strays, as we are with the one who continues in the fellowship - **Mt 18:10-14**

C. IN OUR “DISCIPLINE” OF ONE ANOTHER...

1. We are to remember that we are “brethren”
 - a. Follow a procedure that utilizes to the full advantage our relationship as a family - cf. **Mt 18:15-17**
 - b. Treat the one disciplined as a brother - **2 Th 3:6-15**
2. If the brother in error is not responsive...
 - a. We are to take advantage of the family relationship which we have enjoyed
 - b. By depriving the erring brother of it!
3. Indeed, the failure of much discipline is due to the lack of proper fellowship to begin with!

D. IN “FORGIVING” EACH OTHER...

1. Realizing the value of this intimate, family relationship...
 - a. Forgiveness is to be automatic upon repentance - **Mt 18:21-22**
 - b. We are not to keep a tally of our offenses, for such would hinder our relationship as family
2. We are to keep in mind...
 - a. How our Father has forgiven us
 - b. That our forgiveness by God is contingent on our forgiveness of our brethren! - cf. **Mt 18:23-35**

E. IN “SERVICE” TO ONE ANOTHER...

1. Our “older brother” came to serve - **Mt 20:25-28**
2. So we are to serve one another as we would in our physical family (as the saying goes, “**He ain’t heavy, he’s my brother!**”) - cf. **Ro 15:1-3**

[All these things are emphasizing an important spiritual truth: The church is to be such a fellowship of believers that it can be rightly considered as:

- 1) A home away from home!
- 2) A home which is our true home!

Allow me to expand upon this last thought...]

III. THE CHURCH: OUR TRUE HOME

A. THE COST OF DISCIPLESHIP CAN BE GREAT...

1. For some, it may even mean forsaking their earthly family
2. Cf. **Mt 10:34-39**

B. CHRIST INTENDS FOR HIS CHURCH TO MAKE UP FOR ANY COST...

1. Whether it be:
 - a. The cost of putting Christ before family
 - b. The cost of leaving family to serve Christ (e.g., going to missionary fields)
2. Christ has promised a hundred fold in replacement - cf. **Mk 10:28-30**

C. THE CHURCH CAN BE A HOME (FAMILY) FOR ALL...

1. Especially for those away from home (e.g., college students)
2. Especially for those who never had a family at all, or an incomplete one (e.g., orphans, or those with single parents)
3. Especially for those from a “dysfunctional” family (e.g., those abused, neglected)

[But for the church to be the home Christ intended, the family “members” must do their part. And for some that might mean making some changes...]

IV. BUILDING FAMILY INTIMACY IN THE CHURCH

A. WE MAY NEED TO SPEND MORE TIME WITH EACH OTHER...

1. For some, it may mean being more faithful about attending the services (“mealtimes”) of the church
2. For others, it may mean widening our circle of fellowship to include others
3. For all of us, it means...
 - a. Being less self-centered!
 - b. Being more willing to become involved with the concerns of others!

B. WE MAY NEED TO BECOME MORE INVOLVED IN THE WORK OF THE “CHURCH FAMILY”...

1. For our task is not just to create some sort of “social club”
2. But a “family of believers” who are active in doing the will of their Father in heaven, including...
 - a. Saving souls
 - b. Restoring the erring
 - c. Edifying the saved-- Indeed, reconciling all with the Father and His family!

3. So we need to provide the appropriate service, which in turn builds intimacy:
 - a. Preaching and teaching
 - b. Exhorting and restoring
 - c. Ministering to the needs of the family, both spiritual and physical

CONCLUSION

1. What are we doing to see that the church is fulfilling its design to be “**An Intimate Household**”?
2. If we are doing nothing, or if we are depriving others from trying to become close to us...
 - a. We are depriving ourselves of one of the greatest blessings found in Christ!
 - b. We are also giving the impression that we may be false disciples of Christ! - cf. **Jn 13:35**

Brethren, let's all work harder at being the kind of family God would have us to be! If becoming a child of God is your need today, consider what Paul wrote about how we become sons of God - cf. **Ga 3:26-27...**

Our Life Together

No Life Outside The Body

INTRODUCTION

1. So far in this study on **“Our Life Together”**...
 - a. We have seen that fellowship in the church is both:
 - 1) A **“vertical”** relationship with God
 - 2) A **“horizontal”** relationship with fellow Christians
 - b. We also noticed that the fellowship in Christ's church:
 - 1) Was to be similar to the intimacy found in a family
 - 2) For the church is indeed the **“family of God”**
2. In this lesson, we shall consider how the church in its fellowship is like a **“body”**...
 - a. With Christ as its head
 - b. And its members dependent upon the head and each other
...that it can be truly said there is **“No Life Outside The Body”**!

[We begin by noticing some things about...]

I. THE CHURCH AS THE “BODY OF CHRIST”

A. THAT THE CHURCH IS THE BODY OF CHRIST...

1. Is evident from Paul's statement to the Colossians - **Co 1:18**
2. Is stated very clearly in **Ep 1:22-23**

B. AS THE BODY OF CHRIST, THE CHURCH...

1. Is **“saved”** by Christ - **Ep 5:23**
 - a. He saved it out of love, and by giving Himself for it - **Ep 5:25**
 - b. He did so that He might make it a "glorious" church - **Ep 5:26-27**
 - 1) By sanctifying and cleansing it
 - 2) So it might be holy and without blemish
2. Is **“nourished”** and **“cherished”** by Christ - **Ep 5:29**
 - a. Even as husbands do for the wives they love
 - b. This suggests that the work of Christ in behalf of His church goes beyond just dying on the cross, but continues on in some way

[The main point I am leading to is this: **Outside the church, the body of Christ, there is no life!**

- ◆ There is no salvation outside the body, the church! - **Ep 5:23**
- ◆ There is no spiritual nourishment outside the body, the church! - **Ep 5:29**

We know how He provides **“salvation”** to those in His church (through His blood), but how does He

provide “life” (i.e., nourishment, strength) to those in the body?]

II. HOW CHRIST PROVIDES LIFE TO THOSE IN THE BODY

A. DIRECTLY, FROM THE HEAD TO THE MEMBERS OF THE BODY...

1. As He suggested by the figure of the vine and branches - cf. **Jn 15:5**
2. As illustrated in the statement of Paul - **Ph 4:13**
3. So the direct and individual relationship we have with Christ is one avenue of the “life” (i.e., nourishment, strength)

B. INDIRECTLY, BY THE PROPER WORKING OF EACH MEMBER...

1. Each member has been given some ability by the grace of God - cf. **Ro 12:4-8**
2. We are expected to “minister it to one another”, i.e., use it to the benefit of others - cf. **1 Pe 4:9**
3. When each member is doing its part, the body is capable of building itself up in love - **Ep 4:15-16**

C. THUS WE RECEIVE “LIFE” (STRENGTH) FROM TWO SOURCES...

1. Directly from Christ (through our individual association with Him)
2. Indirectly from Christ (through our association or fellowship with the members of His body, the church)
3. An **example**:
 - a. We can receive “comfort” directly from God in Christ - **2 Co 1:3-4a,5** (e.g., through prayer - **Ph 4:6-7**)
 - b. Yet we pass this “comfort” along to others - **2 Co 1:4b**
 - c. For that is how God often provides “comfort” to us indirectly - cf. **2 Co 7:6-7**

[As we understand **how** Christ imparts “life” to the body, we can more fully appreciate...]

III. THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERY MEMBER OF THE BODY

A. EVERY MEMBER IS NEEDED FOR THE BODY TO FUNCTION WELL...

1. No one can say they are not important - cf. **1 Co 12:14-19**
2. No one can say others are not needed - cf. **1 Co 12:20-25**

B. SO “INTERDEPENDENT” ARE THE MEMBERS, THAT WHAT AFFECTS ONE AFFECTS ALL...!

1. As Paul taught in **1 Co 12:26-27**
2. So when a member begins to reason within himself...
 - a. “I am not needed”
 - b. “I won't be missed”
 - c. “There's nothing that I can do that is important”...and by such reasoning remains an inactive member, the whole body suffers!
3. In such cases, the body (church) becomes “**handicapped!**”
 - a. The church is not working at its full potential
 - b. Because there is not what Paul described as “the effective working by which every part

does it's share" - **Ep 4:16**

4. And when the body (church) is "handicapped"..
 - a. Christ is unable to provide the full extent of His life and nourishment!
 - b. For as we have seen, the body (church) is one means by which He does so
 - c. The end result is that "growth of the body for the edifying of itself in love" does not occur!

CONCLUSION

1. When we understand that the church is the "body of Christ" and functions like a body which needs the working of every member..
 - a. We see the need for becoming more involved
 - b. We see the need for doing what we can to improve the fellowship among those who make up the body
2. From a negative perspective, we might ask "**How long will Christ endure members who do not perform their function?**"
 - a. Not long, from what Jesus taught His disciples in **Jn 15:2,6**
 - b. Understandably so, for a member of the body that does not function is often better removed lest it become a hindrance to the working of other members!
 - c. And since Christ is always adding "new" members to His body...
 - 1) (He is adding daily those who are being saved - **Ac 2:47**)
 - 2) He can always replace nonfunctioning members with those willing to serve!
 - a) Cf. Mordecai's words to Esther - **Est 4:14**
 - b) Just as Judas Iscariot was replaced by Matthias - **Ac 1:15-26**
3. From a more positive perspective, let me ask..
 - a. "Why deprive **ourselves** of nourishment Christ provides through the members of His body?"
-- For that is what we are doing when we don't have much fellowship with others in the body!
 - b. "Why deprive **others** of nourishment Christ provides through the members of His body?"
-- For that is what we are doing when we fail to add what we can do to the fellowship of the body!

Let's all work at being more productive members of the body of Christ, so that we may all benefit by the mutual strength and edification we have in Christ!

"As each one has received a gift, minister it to one another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God."

"If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God. If anyone ministers, let him do it as with the ability which God supplies, that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom belong the glory and the dominion forever and ever. Amen."

(1 Pe 4:10-11)

Our Life Together

An Accepting Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. Our study so far has focused on important concepts related to the nature of our fellowship in Christ...
 - a. It is patterned after that found in a family (“**An Intimate Household**”)
 - b. We are truly interdependent upon one another (“**No Life Outside The Body**”)

2. Another important concept in developing the type of fellowship that should exist in the church of our Lord is that of “**acceptance**”...
 - a. It is easy for there to be acceptance in a family because of the physical ties
 - b. It is also easy in social organizations that are based upon things the members have in common
 - **In the church, it not always easy; for you have people with various backgrounds, lifestyles, and interests**

3. How can a thriving fellowship exist in the midst of such differences?

[The answer lies in understanding and applying the concept of “**acceptance**” in the family of God. To appreciate the challenge facing the church, consider...]

I. THE NATURE OF OUR DIFFERENCES

A. THE DIFFERENCES IN A CHURCH CAN BE MANY...

1. Differences in “race” (white, oriental, African-American)
2. Differences in “nationalities” (American, Canadian, Mexican, etc.)
3. Differences in “political ideologies” (conservative, liberal, libertarian, etc.)
4. Differences in “economic status” (poor, wealthy)
5. Differences in “lifestyles” (simple, extravagant, etc.)
6. Differences in “secular interests” (sports, computing, hobbies)
7. Differences in “spiritual maturity” (weak in faith, strong in faith)

B. ALL THESE DIFFERENCES POSSESS POTENTIAL FOR DISRUPTION...

1. Prejudice or bigotry in any one area can destroy the unity (and fellowship) in a local congregation
2. Even on a more innocent level, “cliques” can develop among those who have things in common
- **How can we be one and enjoy fellowship with so many differences?**

[The answer lies in understanding...]

II. GOD’S ATTITUDE TOWARD “ACCEPTANCE”

A. GOD IS NOT ONE TO SHOW PARTIALITY...

1. He revealed Himself to Israel as One who shows no partiality - **Deu 10:17**
2. Paul wrote of God's impartial judgment to come - **Ro 2:9-11**
3. Peter also wrote of God's impartiality - **1 Pe 1:17**

B. GOD IS WILLING TO ACCEPT ALL...

1. This was the purpose of the vision shown to Peter, and the Spirit falling upon the Gentiles - cf. **Ac 10:34-35**
2. As Peter related later at the Jerusalem conference, God makes no distinction - **Ac 15:7-9**
3. In his last epistle, Peter wrote that the Lord desires all to come to repentance - **2 Pe 3:9**

C. GOD WANTS US TO BE ONE, AND ACCEPT ONE ANOTHER...

1. Even as Christ has received us, so we are to receive one another - **Ro 15:7**
2. Putting on Christ in baptism, our differences lose their significance as we contemplate our oneness made possible in Him - cf. **Ga 3:27-28**

[When we understand that God is no respecter of persons, and that we are to receive one another just as He has received us, we are in a better position to have “**An Accepting Fellowship**”.

Here are few more thoughts along the lines of...]

III. APPLYING THE CONCEPT OF “ACCEPTANCE”

A. DO NOT PRACTICE “PARTIALITY”...

1. By showing favoritism towards some, and prejudice towards others - **Ja 2:1**
2. As an example, consider **Ja 2:2-9**
 - a. Where we are told to accept the poor as well as the rich
 - b. This principle can be applied in many other areas where there are differences
3. We must also beware of “reverse partiality” (e.g., where the poor despise the rich, out of envy)

B. PUT ON THE “NEW MAN” THROUGH SPIRITUAL RENEWAL...

1. Whatever our differences, we are all to become like Christ - **Co 3:9-10**
2. As we do so, our differences lose significance - **Co 3:11**
3. For as we develop Christ-like character, the potential for partiality lessens - **Co 3:12-15**
 - a. We will have a heart of compassion, not ice
 - b. We will be kind, not cruel
 - c. We will be humble, not proud
 - d. We will be gentle, not harsh
 - e. We will be patient, not intolerant
 - f. We will be forgiving, not judgmental
 - g. We will be loving, not bigoted

C. THOUGH DIFFERENCES LOSE THEIR SIGNIFICANCE, THIS DOES NOT MEAN DIFFERENCES CEASE TO EXIST...

1. A Jew is still a Jew, and a Gentile is still a Gentile

2. The poor are still poor, and the rich are still rich
3. Divine guidelines governing some differences must still be respected
 - a. The servant must still honor his responsibilities as a slave - cf. **Co 3:22-25**
 - b. The differences in responsibilities between male and female must still honored - cf. **Co 3:18; 1 Ti 2:11-12; 1 Co 14:34-38**
 - c. Just as all members are to submit to the “elders” - cf. **1 Ti 3:1-7; He 13:17**

CONCLUSION

1. As we grow in Christ, putting on the “new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him”, we are more likely to fulfill the admonition of Paul:

“Therefore receive one another, just as Christ also received us, to the glory of God.” (Ro 15:7)

2. Only as we accept one another without partiality can we hope to attain to the level of fellowship the Lord intended for His people to enjoy in the family of God

Are you contributing to “**An Accepting Fellowship**”? Are you willing to accept others, even as God has accepted you?

Our Life Together

Freedom In Our Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. We have seen that the Lord intends for us to enjoy a fellowship together in the church of Christ which has...
 - a. The **intimacy** of a family
 - b. The **interdependence** of a body
 - c. An **acceptance** of one another despite differences in many things
2. That fellowship may truly flourish in a local congregation, it is important to understand certain concepts that can have a bearing on fellowship...
 - a. The proper use of our **freedom** in Christ is one such concept
 - b. Failure to understand the nature and proper application of **liberty** has ruptured the fellowship of many churches
3. In this lesson, we shall examine the nature of our freedom in Christ and how it affects our fellowship with one another

[Let's begin by defining...]

I. THE NATURE OF OUR FREEDOM IN CHRIST

A. WE ENJOY "FREEDOM" IN CHRIST...

1. Jesus offered freedom to His disciples - **Jn 8:31-32,36**
2. Paul taught that Christ has made us free, and we should be careful to stand fast in this liberty - **Ga 5:1**
3. James refers to the "perfect law of liberty" - **Ja 1:25**

B. THE NATURE OF THIS FREEDOM...

1. Does this mean we are totally free from any sort of obligation?
 - a. That we are free to "do our own thing"?
 - b. That we have no responsibilities to anyone?
 - c. That we are free from having to be concerned about others?
-- Of course not!
2. We should be careful to understand the context of freedom in Christ
 - a. Jesus was promising freedom from sin - **Jn 8:34-36**
 - b. Paul had reference to freedom from rudimentary elements of the Old Law - **Ga 4:3-5, 8-11**
 - c. The "perfect law of liberty" is a blessing only to those who are "doers of the word" - **Ja 1:21-25**
3. The truth of the matter is that we have been set "free" in order that we might "serve"!
 - a. Set free from the slavery of sin, that we might be servants of righteousness - **Ro 6:**

17-18; cf. 6:12-16

- b. We are now free to “serve one another” through love - **Ga 5:13**

[As Paul reveals in **Ga 5:13-15**, there is a very real danger of abusing our liberty to provide an opportunity for the flesh. Christ died to give us freedom “**from**” sin, not to give us freedom “**to**” sin!

Freed from sin, we need to be careful how we use this freedom, especially in our fellowship with one another...]

II. HOW THIS FREEDOM RELATES TO FELLOWSHIP

A. THE CHURCH AT CORINTH: A CASE IN POINT...

1. The situation:
 - a. Brethren were claiming to have true knowledge about eating meat sacrificed to idols - **1 Co 8:1-6**
 - b. By their example and influence, they were encouraging others to violate their conscience - **1 Co 8:7**
 - c. Those who so violated their weak conscience were sinning - cf. **Ro 14:23**
2. Even if there was liberty in Christ to eat such things, Paul counseled against it
 - a. Because it was a stumbling block to those weak in faith - **1 Co 8:9-10**
 - b. Because this abuse of knowledge and liberty was causing brethren to sin, which in itself is a sin against Christ! - **1 Co 8:11-12**
3. Paul provides himself as an example of the proper use of freedom
 - a. He is willing to go to extremes in service to his weak brother - **1 Co 8:13**
 - b. Though an apostle, enjoying freedom in Christ - **1 Co 9:1**
 - c. He is willing to place limitations on his freedom to save others - **1 Co 9:19-23**
4. He concludes his treatment on this subject with a command for us to follow his example - **1 Co 10:31-11:1**

B. PAUL GAVE SIMILAR COUNSEL TO CHURCH IN ROME...

1. The strong in faith are to be considerate of those weak in faith - **Ro 14:1,13**
2. Even if it means giving up things that are right within themselves - **Ro 14:14-23**
3. Bearing with the scruples of the weak, seeking their edification, follows the example of Christ Himself - **Ro 15:1-3**

C. IMAGINE THE FELLOWSHIP WHERE THESE PRINCIPLES ARE FOLLOWED...

1. Rather than just trying to please ourselves, there would be serious efforts to build up one another
 - a. I would not think of the value of assembling just for my own personal benefit
 - b. I would also be concerned about the impact of my absence on others!
2. Brethren would be patient with those weak in faith, willing even to forego liberties in Christ in order to serve
 - a. I would not be desirous to press issues or ideas on those whose consciences could not allow them to participate
 - b. Instead, I would seek other ways where we could accomplish the same goals
3. An atmosphere of love, service, and unity would exist, in which fellowship could truly thrive

to the glory of God!

CONCLUSION

1. The fellowship we enjoy in Christ is a “precious” thing, made possible by the work of Christ on the cross - cf. **Ep 2:13-22**
2. Yet, that fellowship is also a “fragile” thing, easily disrupted through our misuse of the freedom we have in Christ!
3. The solution? To have that “mind of Christ” in our dealings with one another - **Ph 2:1-8**
 - a. Fellowship in one accord is possible, but only when heed the admonitions given by Paul to the Philippians
 - 1) To do nothing through selfish ambition or conceit
 - 2) To esteem others better than one’s self
 - 3) To look out for the interests of others
 - b. Only by following Christ’s own example humble service, can we insure that fellowship in one accord will continue!

Will we follow the example of Christ in how we use our freedom in our fellowship? Remember:

“For you, brethren, have been called to liberty; only do not use liberty as an opportunity for the flesh, but through love serve one another.” (Ga 5:13)

Our Life Together

Limitations On Our Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. Throughout this study, the focus has been on enhancing the fellowship that Christians have in Christ, made possible by His precious death on the cross - cf. **Ep 2:14-22**
 - a. Jesus died that He might reconcile us back to God “in one body” - **Ep 2:16**
 - b. We are now “fellow-citizens with the saints and members of the household of God” - **Ep 2:19**
 - c. We have been “joined together” as a holy temple in the Lord - **Ep 2:21**
2. I hope that in some way I have challenged us to think about our fellowship, and the importance of doing what we can to nurture it..
 - a. That we strive to develop the family-like intimacy Jesus intended for God’s household
 - b. That we appreciate the true interdependence we have as members in the body of Christ
 - c. That we receive one another as Christ received us
 - d. That we use our liberty in Christ to serve one another in love
3. Yet, while fellowship among brethren is wonderful, sometimes we are called upon to withhold our fellowship from a brother or sister in Christ..
 - a. We may have to view a fellow disciple as “*a heathen and a tax collector*” - cf. **Mt 18:17**
 - b. We may have to “*avoid them*” - cf. **Ro 16:17**
 - c. We might have to “*put away from yourselves that wicked person*” - cf. **1 Co 5:13**
 - d. We might have to “*withdraw*” ourselves and “*not keep company*” with a fellow disciple - cf. **2 Th 3:6,14**
 - e. We might not be able to “*receive him into your house nor greet him*” - cf. **2 Jn 10**
4. Indeed, there are “**Limitations On Our Fellowship**” we must respect if we are to be true to the teachings of Jesus and His apostles!

[These “limitations” are related to the subject of “**Church Discipline**”, and in this study on “Our Life Together” we will briefly touch upon what the Scriptures teach in this regard...]

I. THE COMMAND TO WITHHOLD FELLOWSHIP

A. AS COMMANDED BY JESUS HIMSELF...

1. In the case of a brother who has sinned and refuses to repent - **Mt 18:15-17**
2. Jesus’ own words: “...let him be to you like a heathen and a tax collector.”
 - a. Spoken in the context of social relations at the time
 - b. Jews had no social dealings with Gentiles, nor with their Jewish brethren who worked for the Roman government as tax collectors
3. The point is to withdraw social association from a brother who refuses to repent

B. AS COMMANDED BY HIS APOSTLES...

1. Paul's charge to the church at Rome - **Ro 16:17-18**
 - a. Involving those who "cause divisions and offenses"
 - b. The brethren were to "note" and "avoid them"
2. Paul's charge to the church at Corinth - **1 Co 5:1-13**
 - a. Involving a man who had his father's wife
 - b. The church was instructed:
 - 1) To "deliver such a one to Satan..." - **1 Co 5:5**
 - 2) To "purge out the old leaven" - **1 Co 5:7**
 - 3) To "not keep company" - **1 Co 5:11**
 - 4) "not even to eat with such a person" - **1 Co 5:11**
 - 5) To "put away from yourselves that wicked person." - **1 Co 5:13**
3. Paul's charge to the church at Thessalonica - **2 Th 3:6-15**
 - a. Involving those who would not work and support themselves
 - b. The church was instructed:
 - 1) To "withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us" - **2 Th 3:6**
 - 2) To "note that person and do not keep company with him" - **2 Th 3:14**
4. John's charge to the elect lady and her children - **2 Jn 9-11**
 - a. Involving anyone who would seek their support, and yet not abide in the doctrine of Christ
 - b. They were instructed to "not receive him into your house nor greet him"

[It is clearly evident that "withholding fellowship" is necessary under certain conditions. What is the purpose of placing such a limitation on our fellowship?]

II. THE PURPOSE FOR WITHHOLDING FELLOWSHIP

A. TO SAVE THE SOUL IN ERROR...

1. One who refuses to repent of sin is in a lost state - cf. **He 10:26-31**
2. By making him "ashamed" of his sin, perhaps he may repent - cf. **2 Th 3:14**
3. Consider Paul's words in **1 Co 5:5...**
 - a. The church is to "*deliver such a one to Satan*"
 - 1) That is, to remove all godly influence from that person
 - 2) This is done by withdrawing fellowship
 - b. The purpose is "*for the destruction of the flesh*"
 - 1) It is "fleshly desires" (of which pride plays a great part) that encourage one to persist in sin
 - 2) But "shame" can go a long way to destroying these things of the flesh
 - 3) Therefore the command to publicly note and withdraw from such a person - cf. **1 Co 5:4,13**
 - c. The ultimate goal: "*that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus*"
 - 1) Our concern is not his (or even our own) temporary happiness
 - 2) But the salvation of his soul on the day of judgment!
 - 3) Therefore the need for "tough love" by withholding fellowship

B. TO SAVE THE SOULS OF THE OTHER MEMBERS IN THE CHURCH...

1. This is Paul's point about the need to purge out the "leaven" - cf. **1 Co 5:6-8**
2. Just as leaven infects the whole loaf, so can "sin in the camp"!
3. Sin left unchecked will destroy the other members in the congregation
 - a. Either by tempting them to sin in similar fashion
 - b. Or by their failure to exercise the proper discipline
 - 1) For they would then be guilty before the Lord on that basis!
 - 2) As was the church in Pergamos - cf. **Re 2:14-16**
4. Even if the erring brother does not repent, the church will still be saved!

C. TO MAGNIFY THE LORD AND HIS CHURCH IN THE EYES OF THE WORLD...

1. This was an effect of the first case of "church discipline" recorded in the NT
 - a. The example of Ananias and Sapphira illustrates how seriously the Lord Himself views "sin in the camp" - cf. **Ac 5:1-10**
 - b. The result was one of "fear", yet great "esteem", which lead to many conversions - **Ac 5:11-14**
2. The world is not going to take the gospel call to holiness seriously if the church does not deal properly with "sin in the camp"
3. But when a church deals with unrepentant sin in the manner of withholding fellowship, the reputation of the church is held in high esteem
4. When people decide to get serious about sin, where do you think they will go?
 - a. To a church that winks at sin?
 - b. Or one that provides every proper motivation to turn from sin?

CONCLUSION

1. There is much more that can be said on the subject of "withholding fellowship" as it relates to church discipline...
 - a. Indeed, an entire series can be presented on this subject
 - b. Which I plan to do myself another time, the Lord willing
2. But I trust this will suffice to make two points about "**Our Life Together**"...
 - a. Our fellowship together in Christ has **limitations**
 - 1) While it is true we are to have "a receiving fellowship"
 - 2) ...there may come a time when we must have "a rejecting fellowship"!
 - b. Our fellowship together in Christ needs to be **very special**
 - 1) Not only so we might enjoy all the blessings Christ intended in the family of God
 - 2) But should it ever be necessary to withhold fellowship as a last effort to save a brother's soul, what is withheld will really be missed!-- Church discipline often fails because the fellowship never was what it should have been!
3. So Christian fellowship serves a twofold purpose...
 - a. To "**enhance**" the relationship we have in the family of God
 - b. To "**preserve**" the relationship we have in the family of God

To enjoy the fullest blessings of Christian fellowship, let us all do what we can to strengthen "**Our Life Together**"!

Our Life Together

How Worship Enhances Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. Thus far we have been dealing “doctrinal” underpinnings of **“Our Life Together”**...
 - a. Noticing the **“intimacy”** and **“interdependency”** of our fellowship in the local church
 - b. Examining the concepts of **“acceptance”** and **“freedom”** in Christ as they relate to fellowship
 - c. Reviewing what is said about the **“limitations”** of our fellowship
2. With this lesson I wish to begin address the **“application”** side of our study...
 - a. What can we “do” to strengthen our life together?
 - b. What sort of things enhance the fellowship we enjoy in Christ?
3. I want us to examine various **“acts of worship”** ...
 - a. Which we do in our public assemblies
 - b. Which I believe are designed to build and enhance our fellowship in Christ

[Let’s start by examining two acts of worship that we engage in at every service...]

I. ENHANCING FELLOWSHIP THROUGH PRAYER AND SONG

A. CONSIDER THE EXAMPLE OF THE EARLY CHURCH...

1. They were quick to join themselves together in prayer
 - a. They continued steadfastly in prayer - **Ac 2:42**
 - b. Especially in the face of persecution - **Ac 4:18-33; 12:1-12**
2. They had fellowship in singing as well
 - a. While enduring imprisonment - **Ac 16:25**
 - b. Note the connection of singing with praying

B. HOW PRAYER AND SONG ENHANCES FELLOWSHIP...

1. Through the benefits of prayer, especially collective praying
 - a. Prayer is a wonderful source of strength and peace - **Ph 4:6-7**
 - b. But there is also a special value when brethren pray together!
 - 1) Jesus taught the value of collective prayer - cf. **Mt 18:19-20**
 - 2) James taught the value of the prayer of a righteous man; how much more the value of many righteous people praying! - cf. **Ja 5:16**
2. Through the benefits of song, especially collective singing
 - a. Singing can certainly be an individual expression of praise - cf. **Ja 5:13**
 - b. When done together, it also serves as a form of mutual edification - **Co 3:16**
 - c. This can lead to increased blessings, for such collective singing can:
 - 1) Nurture a heart of thankfulness to God - **Co 3:16**
 - 2) Help us be “filled with the Spirit” - **Ep 5:18-19**

[The early church certainly took advantage of the full blessings to be found in prayer and song; they not only prayed and sang as individuals, but collectively as well. This helped to strengthen the fellowship they enjoyed in Christ.

What about us today? Do we allow prayer and song to strengthen our fellowship in the body of Christ? Do we see the value in devoting much of our service to prayer and song?

Let's now take a look at an "act of worship" we engage in every first day of the week...]

II. ENHANCING FELLOWSHIP THROUGH THE LORD'S SUPPER

A. THERE ARE SEVERAL IMPORTANT ASPECTS OF THE SUPPER...

1. **It is "a memorial" - 1 Co 11:23-25**
 - a. Instituted by the Lord Himself
 - b. To commemorate the death of Jesus on the cross for our sins - **Mt 26:26-28**
2. **It is "a proclamation" - 1 Co 11:26**
 - a. In which we proclaim our faith in the efficacy of Jesus' death in our behalf
 - b. To be done till He comes again (so it also a proclamation of our faith in His Second Coming)
3. **It is to be "a period of extreme reverence" - 1 Co 11:27,29**
 - a. It is to be observed "in a worthy manner"
 - b. Out of respect for the supreme price Jesus paid for our sins
4. **It is "a time for self-examination" - 1 Co 11:28**
 - a. Reflecting upon our own spiritual condition in relation to the sacrifice of Christ
 - b. Are we living in a manner that makes His sacrifice worthwhile?
5. **It is "a communion" (sharing, fellowship) - 1 Co 10:16**
 - a. With the blood and body of Christ
 - b. Certainly, then, a "vertical" relationship and fellowship with Christ as we commune

B. THERE IS ALSO THE ELEMENT OF FELLOWSHIP WITH OTHERS...

1. It also has something to do with "our oneness in the body of Christ"! - **1 Co 10:17**
 - a. Though many, we are "one bread and one body"
 - b. Why? "for we all partake of that one bread"
 - c. There are at least two possible ways to view this...
 - 1) Partaking of the one bread together "reminds" us of our oneness, i.e., our fellowship
 - 2) Partaking of the one bread together "strengthens" our oneness, or fellowship
 -- Both views are plausible, and both are accomplished, whether or not that is what Paul actually had in mind
 - d. In this way the Supper is an act of worship in which there is both:
 - 1) A "vertical" fellowship (communion with the Lord's body and blood)
 - 2) A "horizontal" fellowship (communion with one another)
2. This helps us to see some implications in several passages
 - a. E.g., **Ac 20:7** - "...when the disciples came together to break bread..."
 - b. E.g., **1 Co 11:33** - "...when you come together to eat, wait for one another"
 - c. The Supper is designed to be a "communal" meal (even as the Passover, from which the Lord took elements to institute the Lord's Supper, was a communal meal)

[The Lord's Supper is more than just a personal act of devotion between a Christian and his Lord. As we partake together, it should remind us of our fellowship in the one body of Christ, and by such remembrance strengthen our sense of fellowship!

Now let's take a look at an "act of worship" which may be considered by some as the least "spiritual" and therefore least likely to build fellowship...]

III. ENHANCING FELLOWSHIP THROUGH THE WEEKLY COLLECTION

A. HOW SOME MAY VIEW THE COLLECTION...

1. A way to pay the bills
 - a. As a mere mechanical detail necessary to raise money to pay the bills
 - b. As a rude intrusion of secular necessity into an otherwise spiritual service
 - 1) I.e., singing, prayer, Bible study...these are spiritual activities
 - 2) But the collection...what does taking up money (mammon) have to do with worshipping God?

-- With this view, some might think to themselves: "Hurry up and pass the plate, so we can get on to more spiritual matters!"
2. A private act between the Christian and his God
 - a. Some may understand that there is a spiritual side to the collection
 - 1) That giving is an act of devotion to God
 - 2) That I am giving back to Him as He has prospered me
 - b. Yet may view the collection solely as a private matter between a person and His God, with no bearing one's fellowship with others

B. THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF THE COLLECTION...

1. A brief survey of giving in the New Testament church may be helpful
 - a. The church in Jerusalem
 - 1) There was a commendable spirit of giving for brethren in need - **Ac 2:44-45; 4:32-35**
 - 2) This evidently was a "freewill offering", not something required - **Ac 5:1-4**

-- Here we have Christians in one congregation helping each other
 - b. The church in Antioch
 - 1) Responding to a prophecy about a coming famine - **Ac 11:27-28**
 - 2) They sent relief "according to their ability" to brethren in Judea - **Ac 11:29-30**

-- Here we have one church helping many churches
 - c. The ministry of Paul
 - 1) He was asked to remember the poor - **Ga 2:9-10**
 - 2) Which he was careful to do - cf. **1 Co 16:1-4; 2 Co 8-9; Ro 15:25-26**

-- Here we have many churches helping one church
2. A careful study of these verses reveal the Biblical view of the collection
 - a. **A means of supplying need**
 - 1) The needs of impoverished brethren - cf. **2 Co 9:12a**
 - 2) Also the needs of preaching brethren - cf. **Ph 1:5; 4:15-16; 2 Co 11:8-9**
 - b. **A means of building and strengthening fellowship!**

- 1) Note how Paul viewed the support received from Philippi - **Ph 1:5; 4:15-16**
- 2) Note how Paul viewed the collection the Gentile churches were sending to their Jewish brethren
 - a) The Gentiles had been partakers (fellowship) in spiritual matters with their Jewish brethren, now they were simply sharing (fellowship) with them in physical matters - **Ro 15:27**
 - b) The effect of such sharing was to create “longing” for one another; i.e., more spiritual fellowship together! - **2 Co 9:12-15**
- 3) In the church at Jerusalem, such sharing was evidence that:
 - a) They were of “one heart and one soul” (possessing true fellowship) - **Ac 4:32**
 - b) They had true love for one another - cf. **1 Jn 3:16-18**

CONCLUSION

1. Every act of worship is designed to enhance our fellowship in the body of Christ...
 - a. Yes, there are elements of personal devotion in each of them
 - b. But we come together for a reason, and that reason includes enhancing our fellowship through activities which bind us closer together in Christ!
2. The fellowship we enjoy in Christ...
 - a. Was made possible only by His death on the cross
 - b. But is strengthened whenever we assemble and participate in such activities as:
 - 1) Singing and prayer
 - 2) The Lord’s Supper
 - 3) Even the collection
3. If you seek to truly enjoy “**Our Life Together**”...
 - a. Never forsake the assembling of ourselves together - **He 10:24-25**
 - b. Take advantage of the “tools” that God has ordained to draw us closer to Him and to one another!

Our Life Together

Enriching Our Life Together

INTRODUCTION

1. With our previous study we began to address the “application” side of our study...
 - a. What can we do to enhance our fellowship?
 - b. We saw that our acts of devotion when we assemble do just that!
2. With this study we continue to examine the “application” side...
 - a. What can we “do” to enrich our life together?
 - b. What sort of things should we “avoid” that have the potential of disrupting fellowship?
3. There are many places we could turn to in the New Testament for a study on “**Enriching Our Life Together**”...
 - a. Indeed, much of the New Testament addresses the subject in one form or another
 - b. But in this study, we will focus mainly on what we find in “**The Epistle Of James**”
4. Addressed to those who were “scattered abroad” (**Ja 1:1**), it is especially full of advice for...
 - a. Christians who find themselves living in a highly mobile society like our own
 - b. Christians whose need for “fellowship” is often a truly “felt need” (because other normal channels of association like family, friends, etc., may be lacking)

[Let’s begin by observing things we must “**not**” do or have, if we desire to succeed in “**Enriching Our Life Together**”...]

I. THINGS TO AVOID

A. ALL FILTHINESS AND OVERFLOW OF WICKEDNESS - Ja 1:21

1. I take this to include any sort of immoral behavior or speech - cf. **Ep 5:3-5**
 2. The wise man wrote of the devastating effects of immorality - cf. **Pr 6:27-35**
- **Nothing will destroy the precious fellowship we have in Christ like “sin in the camp”**

B. PARTIALITY - Ja 2:1-9

1. This was discussed in our study entitled “An Accepting Fellowship”
 2. Showing respect of persons, either through “partiality”, or its more malignant cousin “bigotry”, makes us sinners before God - **Ja 2:9**
- **Fellowship in Christ is designed to bring us together, not divide us**

C. MISUSE OF THE TONGUE - Ja 3:1-12

1. The tongue possesses great power to destroy, if we are not careful - **Ja 3:5-7**
2. When we misuse the tongue to curse men, it reveals the shallowness of our praise of God - **Ja 3:9-12**

- **During the war, the old Navy saying was “Loose lips sinks ships”; it can have the same effect on the peace and fellowship in a congregation!**

D. SELFISHNESS - Ja 4:1

1. James reveals that the root cause of much strife is nothing more than selfishness
 2. As he wrote earlier, “For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing will be there.” - **Ja 3:16**
- **If we desire peace and harmony in our fellowship, we must grow beyond the egocentricism of our youth and carnality!**

E. SPEAKING EVIL OF ONE ANOTHER - Ja 4:11-12

1. Here we learn that speaking evil of another evil actually “speaks evil of the law and judges the law”; do we wish to be guilty of that?
 2. We also set ourselves up as judges, when there is really only one Judge and Lawgiver
 3. This does not preclude the necessity to “judge with righteous judgment” (**Jn 7:24**), nor that we cannot “judge those who are inside” the family of God (**1 Co 5:9-13**)
- **But too often we can be guilty of “judging” others according to our own personal standards; speaking “evil” of others is usually an indication of that, and quickly destroys fellowship**

[These five things can prevent a congregation from enjoying “**Our Life Together**” that Christ intends for His church. Let’s be diligent never to allow them to infect the relationship we have as the family of God!

At the same time, let’s take a “proactive” approach to building fellowship; what does James counsel us to do...?]

II. THINGS TO DO

A. VIEW CHALLENGES AS OPPORTUNITIES - Ja 1:2-4

1. Possessing a positive perspective about difficulties is good for congregations as well as individuals
2. Any church that is growing will likely experience problems with maintaining peace and harmony
3. But just as marriages are made stronger when spouses are willing to work through their difficulties, so a congregation can be made stronger by its difficulties!

B. PRAY FOR WISDOM - Ja 1:5-8

1. To be able to maintain a thriving fellowship in a congregation requires wisdom
2. Just as we should seek wisdom from God as individuals, so also as a congregation!

C. MAINTAIN PROPER PERSPECTIVES ABOUT OUR SITUATIONS - Ja 1:9-11

1. Fellowship is often disrupted by envy or pride
2. But God gives us reasons to be thankful for whatever situation in which we find ourselves
3. If all the members are willing to see themselves as God sees them, there will be no room for pride or envy

D. BE SWIFT TO HEAR, SLOW TO SPEAK, SLOW TO WRATH - Ja 1:19-20

1. Poor communication and short tempers will quickly destroy any relationship
2. But if all apply this “triad” of graces, problems can be gracefully handled and overcome

E. PRACTICE PURE AND UNDEFILED RELIGION - Ja 1:22-27

1. This involves each of us...
 - a. Being doers of the Word, and not just hearers
 - b. Letting our actions speak louder than our words
 - c. Attending to the needs of the less fortunate
 - d. Keeping ourselves untainted by the world
2. Wouldn't it be wonderful to have fellowship in a congregation where all are true “practitioners” of this kind of religion?

F. DEMONSTRATE WISDOM BY YOUR CONDUCT - Ja 3:13,17-18

1. Again, we are letting our actions speak louder than our words
2. Note especially verse 17, wouldn't it be wonderful to be in a congregation filled with people demonstrating a wisdom that is: “...first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy.”?

G. PRAY FOR ONE ANOTHER - Ja 5:13-16

1. When we are praying for others, it is hard to be angry at them
2. When we know others are praying for us, it is hard not to love them
3. When we are praying for each other, not only is our fellowship with God strengthened, but our fellowship with one another!

H. RESTORE THE ERRING - Ja 5:19-20

1. When people stray from the faith, we lose the benefit of their fellowship with us
2. Restoring them back to God not only saves them, but blesses us with their renewed fellowship!

CONCLUSION

1. This quick survey of The Epistle Of James illustrates many of the good things we can do to be **“Enriching Our Life Together”**
2. Indeed, the entire New Testament is filled with admonitions...
 - a. Not only to enhance our relationship with God
 - b. But also to enhance our fellowship with one another!

-- **Let the Word of God be our guide to creating and maintaining “Our Life Together”!**

How about “your” relationship with God and His children (i.e., the church)? Is it what it ought to be? Can we help you draw nearer to God and His family...? - cf. **Ga 3:26-27; Ja 5:16**

Our Life Together

Using The Home To Build Fellowship

INTRODUCTION

1. Our previous study continued our focus on the “application” side of “**Our Life Together**”...
 - a. By observing how the Scriptures are filled with exhortations
 - b. Which taken to heart will nurture fellowship in the local church

2. We noticed one such example, the Epistle of James, where we found admonitions...
 - a. **On things to “avoid”**
 - 1) All filthiness and overflow of wickedness
 - 2) Partiality
 - 3) Misuse of the tongue
 - 4) Selfishness
 - 5) Speaking evil of one another
 - b. **On things to “do”**
 - 1) View challenges as opportunities
 - 2) Pray for wisdom
 - 3) Maintain proper perspectives about our situations
 - 4) Be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath
 - 5) Practice pure and undefiled religion
 - 6) Demonstrate wisdom by your conduct
 - 7) Pray for one another
 - 8) Restore the erring

3. The Scriptures teach not only by “precept”, but also by “example”...
 - a. And the example of the early church provides insight into ways fellowship can be strengthened
 - b. One such example is their use of the **home**
 - c. I believe a study of the New Testament church shows that their success in both evangelism and in building fellowship was partly due to their use of the home

[To appreciate what I mean, let’s begin by observing...]

I. THE USE OF THE HOME BY THE EARLY CHURCH

A. HOMES WERE USED WITH MUCH FREQUENCY...

1. The church in Jerusalem, especially in times of persecution - **Ac 5:41-42; 12:5,12**
2. Aquila and Priscilla often hosted the church in their home - **Ro 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19**
3. Another example is Philemon - **Phile 1-2**
4. Paul utilized homes in his ministry, both at Ephesus and in Rome - **Ac 20:17-21; 28:30-31**

B. BUT WITH TIME, THE USE OF THE HOME BEGAN TO DECLINE...

1. We know that “church buildings” began to be built as early as the second century

2. When Constantine, emperor of Rome, was “converted” in 312 A.D...
 - a. He designated Christianity the “official religion” of the empire
 - b. He gave many of the pagan temples to the Christians to use as meeting places
3. Before long, people began to view the building as “the church”
 - a. Homes were not used as much as before
 - b. Most “religious activity” began to be centered around the building
 - c. Such is the case today, where most “religious activity” takes place at the church building

[I suspect that this subtle shift of activity away from the “home” to the “church building” contributed to a decline of fellowship among many Christians. Allow me to elaborate why...]

II. WHY USING THE HOME IS IMPORTANT TO FELLOWSHIP

A. BECAUSE OF THE LIMITATION INHERENT TO PUBLIC WORSHIP...

1. Public worship is certainly necessary and important
2. We have already seen that the “acts of worship” are designed to nurture fellowship
3. But there are limits to the degree of fellowship we can have during our public assemblies
 - a. **Limits on “time”**
 - 1) A couple of hours a week do not provide much opportunity to develop meaningful relationships between brethren
 - 2) Especially since the time we actually spend talking to one another is a few minutes before and after the services
 - b. **Limits on “intimacy”**
 - 1) Sheer numbers prevent us from spending much time with everyone
 - 2) We either spend a few minutes with a select few, or even a smaller amount of time with all

B. USING HOMES EXTEND OPPORTUNITY FOR FELLOWSHIP...

1. We have more “time” to visit, to talk, to study, to pray
2. The informal and personal atmosphere of the home allows for more “intimacy”, i.e....
 - a. To become better acquainted
 - b. To proceed beyond mere formalities, to where we can better know and understand one another
3. Opportunities to ask questions, provide answers, study together, are enhanced when we are willing to open our homes to one another

[It should be easy to see that opportunities for meaningful fellowship can be increased through the use of the home. To encourage this idea further, here are some...]

III. SUGGESTIONS FOR USING THE HOME TO BUILD FELLOWSHIP

A. PRACTICE “HOSPITALITY”...

1. We are commanded to practice hospitality among brethren - **1 Pe 4:9**
2. Certainly not all have the same ability to provide hospitality
 - a. Some may be able to have the entire congregation over at one time
 - b. Others may only be able to have a family or two

- c. Yet others may best provide hospitality by taking people out to dinner
 - But to whatever degree we can, let us be fruitful in this area - **1 Pe 4:10**
- 3. Even if we engage in hospitality only on a social level, it can help to increase levels of communication in which spiritual fellowship can occur later
- 4. But consider using your home as place for...
 - a. Home Bible studies with new converts
 - b. Ongoing studies with other Christians
 - c. Periodic devotions, such as singings, prayer meetings, etc.
 - Remember the example of Aquila and Priscilla, who offered the use of their home for the work of the church, wherever they lived - cf. **Ro 16:3-5; 1 Co 16:19**

B. ENGAGE IN “VISITATION”...

- 1. For “hospitality” to work, it must be a two-way street
 - a. We must be willing to accept invitations by others, and visit them
 - b. Sometimes hospitality is not practiced, because people won’t accept invitations!
- 2. We should also make efforts to visit those who may have special needs...
 - a. The sick (both at home and in the hospital)
 - b. Those new in the faith (or otherwise new members of the congregation)
 - c. Those spiritually weak
 - Making ourselves available to be of service to those with such needs is defined as “pure and undefiled religion” - **Ja 1:27**

CONCLUSION

- 1. More could be said, but I hope it is evident that expedient use of the home can greatly facilitate the sort of fellowship Christ intends for His church...
 - a. A fellowship that is a rich one, primarily spiritual in nature
 - b. But one facilitated through practical means like “hospitality” and “visitation”
- 2. Can we not see that **“Our Life Together”** needs to extend...
 - a. Beyond the walls of the church building?
 - b. Beyond the few hours we assemble together for public worship?
- 3. A final point to stimulate your thinking on these things...
 - a. I often ask a congregation: **“We may be a friendly congregation, but are we a hospitable congregation?”**
 - b. The distinction should be evident, which is:
 - 1) “friendly” describes what takes place inside the church building
 - 2) “hospitable” describes what goes on in our homes!

The Lord has blessed us all to various degrees with our homes...let’s be wise stewards and use them to the glory of God and the enrichment of **“Our Life Together”**!