

Christian Fellowship: A Weapon against the Enemy¹
By Chuck Lawless

I went to my first "church fellowship" at age thirteen, when I had been a Christian for only a few months. I had never even heard the term "fellowship" before the previous Sunday, when the words appeared in our church bulletin.

That Wednesday night, I discovered that "fellowship" was about eating . . . and eating . . . and eating some more. Some of the best cooks around were in that church, and I always looked forward to the next time we would have "fellowship" together.

Several months later, I missed church for consecutive Sundays. A concerned church member called me and reminded me that I needed to be in church. "The Bible tells us not to forsake the assembling of yourselves together [Heb. 10:25]," he warned. "Plus, you just need *fellowship* in the church in order to live faithfully."

Well, I knew I needed to be attending church, but I was not sure how eating with church people would help me to live more faithfully before God. Needless to say, I was confused about the nature and purpose of true Christian fellowship--as are many believers today.

True fellowship is about supporting one another. Listen to this snapshot of the early church in the book of Acts: "they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship" (2:42). These believers committed themselves to *koinonia*, meaning "fellowship" or "a close relationship or association." Literally, the word suggests that the church members shared all things in common (2:44).

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The church supported one another by distributing their material goods to those in need (2:44-45). They also shared food together (2:42, 46), primarily meeting in their homes for common meals. The young Christian community shared life together, sustaining one another as the body of Christ.

Support in the church is not limited to sharing goods and meals, however. True fellowship is evidenced when all believers rejoice when one member is honored, and all believers suffer when one member is hurt (1 Cor. 12:26). Believers truly in fellowship will bear one another's burdens (Gal. 6:2). In this kind of unity, no single member is insignificant, and all members are prepared to fight spiritual battles together.

True fellowship is about building up one another in the faith. In genuine fellowship, believers strive to build each other up rather than tear each other down.

Read some of Paul's commands about building up the body of Christ, and notice how edification cannot be separated from the fellowship of Christian relationships:

- "So then we pursue the things which make for peace and the building up of one another." (Rom. 14:9)
- "Each one of us is to please his neighbor for his good, to his edification." (Rom. 15:2)
- "Speaking the truth in love, we are to grow up in all aspects unto Him who is the head, even Christ, from whom the whole body, being fitted and held together by what every joint supplies, according to the proper working of each individual part, causes the growth of the body for the building up of itself in love." (Eph. 4:15-16)
- "Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such as word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear." (Eph. 4:29)
- "Therefore encourage one another and build up one another, just as you also are doing." (1 Thess. 5:11)

One of the goals of a healthy church is to "present every man complete in Christ"

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(Col. 1:28), and genuine fellowship leads toward that goal. Believers who are affirmed, encouraged, loved, and supported are much more likely to march forward in Christian faithfulness when the enemy strikes.

True fellowship is about encouraging one another to love others and to do good deeds. Hebrews 10:25 says much more than just "you need to be in church." Rather, the text must be understood in the light of the previous verses that call believers to "hold fast" and to "stimulate one another to love and good deeds" (10:23-24). The writer of Hebrews expected believers to hold each other accountable to Christian living, particularly in light of a coming day of judgment (v. 25).

One of the reasons Christians met together was to prod each other toward faithful Christian living, especially when they faced persecution (see Heb. 10:32-39, 12:4). Believers who neglected the gatherings missed opportunities to receive the support and motivation they would need. Indeed, they faced great danger if they continued to live outside of God's will, apart from Christian encouragement and accountability.

True fellowship is not just about coming to church; it is about exhorting each other to persevere in faith. As you might recognize, exhortation and encouragement from fellow believers are especially important when we are under spiritual attack.

Brad is an example of a Christian for whom genuine fellowship has made a difference. He became a believer as a teenager, but found himself making immoral choices in his mid 30's. His pastor and deacons loved him enough to confront him. In fact, they informed him that the church would take disciplinary action against him if he ignored their interventions.

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That possibility awakened Brad to the seriousness of his wrong choices. He returned to the church, publicly sought their forgiveness, and agreed to be held accountable for his actions. Today, Brad is a faithful church member, supported by his local church and daily encouraged to stay faithful. *That* is genuine fellowship--the kind that alarms the enemy.

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