

FELLOWSHIP IN SERVICE



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INTRODUCTION

Those whose hearts have been stirred in affection for Christ should want to serve Him. Sad to say, however, for one reason or another some Christians become occupied with service as an object in itself instead of Christ. Some become occupied with man's need instead of God's glory. These things will be in correct adjustment when service is the result of communion with Christ.

Occupation with the wrong thing leads to defective or wrong preaching and practice. Hence the gospel for man's need is often preached (and we thank God that He has provided for man's need) instead of the good news of the glory of Christ (2 Cor. 4:4) and the good news of the glory of God (1 Tim. 1:11), as well as the good news of the grace of God (Acts 20:24). This, which we may properly call Paul's gospel (Rom. 16:25), has been considered in a paper titled "Paul's Gospel."¹

I believe that it is not according to the mind of God that one who has been gathered together to the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Matt. 18:20) should link up in service with those not likewise gathered. The Lord enabling, the following will consider the scriptures that led me to this judgment.

INSTRUCTIVE FACETS OF PAUL'S CONVERSION

There are some instructive truths brought out in connection with Paul's conversion, which we ought to carefully consider.

"But as he was journeying, it came to pass that he drew near to Damascus; and suddenly there shone round about him a light out of heaven, and falling on the earth he heard a voice saying to him, Saul, Saul, why dost thou persecute me? And he said, Who art thou, Lord? And He [said], I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest. But rise up and enter into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do. But the men who were traveling with him stood speechless, hearing the voice but beholding no one." (Acts 9:3-7)

"And last of all, as to an abortion, he appeared to me also." (1 Cor. 15:8)

There are at least two very important things to be gleaned from these passages and these gave character to Paul's service to the Lord.

The first point to note is that Paul saw the Lord in glory! Did any other Christian previously see the Lord thus? Yes, only one: Stephen, at the time of his murder (Acts 7). And note that Saul was there too. (Acts 7:58) When the Jews killed Stephen they said, in effect, "we will not have this man to reign over us" (Luke 19:14). In effect, Stephen was the messenger that the Jews sent after Christ. But blessed be the Lord Jesus Christ, He saved a powerful messenger of fresh GRACE FROM THE GLORY. Saul was saved, the chosen vessel to bear His name before the Gentiles. Has it ever struck the reader that Paul never saw the Lord while He was on earth? No doubt this was purposed of God because He wanted this man's first view of the Lord to be of Christ in glory. The twelve saw the Lord on **this** side of the cloud that received Him; but Paul saw Him on the other side, even in glory. The twelve witnessed about what they saw, i.e. Christ risen from the dead, and Paul witnessed concerning what he saw. What did He see? This is most momentous because it is the starting point of Paul's course as a Christian and all his service derived a character from this starting point. As a result, there

is a difference (but no conflict) in the gospel preaching of Paul and that of the twelve. We speak of the twelve because scripture shows that Matthias (Acts 1:26) was recognized with the eleven (cf Acts 2:14; 6:2; 1 Cor. 15:5, 8). It is a great mistake to link Paul with the eleven. He was not the twelfth; Matthias was. God saw to it that He saved Paul when he was away from Jerusalem (and traveling away) and He saw to it that Paul did not see the Lord Jesus on earth, but only as the glorified Man.

Someone has said that "seeing Jesus in glory is the pivot and center of the gospel which is now entrusted to him." Scripture says, "But rise up and stand on thy feet; for for this purpose have I appeared to thee, to appoint thee to be a servant and a witness both of what thou hast seen, and of what I shall appear to thee in" (Acts 26:16). Besides seeing the Lord in the glory, this informed Paul that there would also be future revelations. One revelation that he received concerned the gospel. This gospel committed to him he calls "my gospel" (Rom. 16:25; 2:16; 2 Tim. 2:8; cf. Gal 1:11-12; 2:1-2). This is part of the burden of his witness, different in certain features (but not contradictory) from all others before him; as different as his view of the Lord differed from others before him. He received an administration of grace, which had its source in the Man in the glory and from the glory.

But now we must hasten to the second momentous point. The words, "I am Jesus, whom thou persecutest," give us the first intimation of the special link that believers have with Christ during this "administration of the mystery" (Eph. 3), i.e. the present time of the church, we being His body (1 Cor. 12), and therefore **he who touches His body touches Him**. Now. let us direct our attention to a matter most important, namely that at the very outset of Paul's life as a Christian, indeed, in the very moment of his conversion, **GOSPEL TRUTH AND CHURCH TRUTH ARE LINKED TOGETHER**. (True, the connection of Christ and the believer is not developed in Acts 9, but let us learn from what is there.) Is that not a grand fact, and perhaps a startling thought too, for have we not often been guilty of separating these two things into somewhat isolated compartments of thought? It is as harmful as it is wrong to disconnect these two things. We ought to distinguish them, but not disconnect them, because God has joined them together.

GOSPEL & CHURCH TRUTH JOINED IN SCRIPTURE

The more we examine this matter the more it becomes evident that the disconnections between these two lines of truth exist only in our minds and not in the Word of God. Consider the following scripture: "Now to him that is able to establish you, according to my glad tidings and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to [the] revelation of [the] mystery, as to which silence has been kept in [the] times of the ages, but [which] has now been made manifest, and by prophetic scriptures, according to commandment of the eternal God, made known for the obedience of faith to all the nations—[the] only wise God, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever. Amen." (Rom. 16:25-27). Reference to Eph. 3 will show the reader some of what is involved in this "mystery". (A mystery in scripture is not something that cannot be understood; it is not mysterious, as men speak, but rather that which was kept secret in past time and is now revealed to the Christian.)

There are a number of things that ought to be noticed in Rom. 16:25. The first is **establishment**. Many are accustomed to thinking that when a person knows that his sins are forgiven, that he is justified, that he has peace with God and is "on his way to heaven" (never presented in this way in scripture as the Christian's hope), that such a person is established. However, this scripture shows that this most certainly is not the case. We are told that establishment is according to **two** things; first, "according to my gospel"; second, "and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery." Did the apostle think that the epistle to the Romans was enough to establish them? Rom. 1:11, considered with 16:25, 26, shows that it was not, because he desired to come to them to give them something beyond what his epistle gave them. In Rom. 1 he lets them know that something else besides his epistle to them was necessary for establishment: in chapter 16 he lets them know what it is. Clearly, the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery is necessary for establishment.

The second point to notice is that according to Romans 16:26, "the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery" is made known for "obedience

of faith to all the nations”, just as well as “my gospel”. The mystery, as well as the gospel, calls for OBEEDIENCE. Does this fact command our earnest attention? Have we duly weighed this? Do we allow this to act on our lives? Have we taken this into account in connection with our service to the Lord?

The third point is that the gospel truth and church truth are here distinguished but not disconnected. Indeed, there is a vital connection: **both are needed for establishment.**

Let us pause and note well, that what has been said about the intimate connection of gospel and church truth is seen, in general, through Paul’s writings. They are linked together, distinguished, but not disconnected.

Let us look at one more place in which we find this: Ephesians 3. We are “joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of [his] promise in Christ Jesus by the glad tidings.” Examine the following verses: “To me, less than the least of all saints, has this grace been given, to announce among the nations the glad tidings of the unsearchable riches of the Christ, and to enlighten all [with the knowledge of] what is the administration of the mystery hidden throughout the ages in God, who has created all things” (Eph. 3:8, 9). What is it that has been committed to Paul? He was to “announce” **and** “enlighten”. Dear reader, let God search us out; does all our service give these two things the place that God desires them to have? The point is not that we must all be a Paul, or an evangelist, or a teacher, etc., but the question is: are my associations in service to the Lord such that there is complete liberty to carry out the will of God in enlightening “all [with the knowledge of] what is the administration of the mystery”? Or am I building up that which is not according to the truth of the one body and the government in the House of God? We must honor God in our associations in service as well as in the breaking of the bread. We must “announce” **and** “enlighten”.

THE GOSPEL IS A MEANS

Some Christians seem to see no farther than what **they** call gospel truth, happy to be saved, happy to see men blessed of God, indeed, often full of zeal in spreading the news of salvation (commendable in itself, especially where

1 Cor. 3:10 is obeyed). However, with some that is as far as it goes. They seem to think that if souls get saved that is the sum and substance of the matter. Actually, this is a low view of the gospel. The gospel is much greater than a fire escape from hell; it is much much greater than merely a blessing for man. How far this contracted view is from the Word of God, which shows that the gospel is a **means**, not an end, by which "the nations should be joint heirs, and a joint body, and joint partakers of [his] promise in Christ Jesus **by** the glad tidings" (Eph. 3:6).

Consider what little thoughts Solomon's workmen, who mined the great stones and costly out of the pit for the foundation of the temple, would have had if they thought like this: "Well, the way I see it is that the really important thing is to get the stones out of the pit. That's what Solomon sent us here to do. Everybody ought to mine stones. We ought not to be concerned so much about other things." These are small thoughts indeed. The architect had a great place for the stones and was thinking of the glory of the great God Who was to dwell in that temple. The mining was a means to an end and not the end in itself. But the attitude of many Christians does not take this into account, little considering that the living stones form God's habitation (Eph. 2:22), little considering the momentous matters of Eph. 3; thinking much of the blessing of sinners but little thinking of God's glory in the cross (1 Tim. 1:11) and in the assembly (Eph. 3:21); and sometimes, too, not seeing God's glory in the sinner's salvation. (Our salvation derives its importance from the fact that God is glorified and that we are a gift from the Father to the Son - John 17:1-3.) Such Christians are not established; they are lop-sided and unbalanced, entering but little, if at all, into the thoughts of the architect (1 Cor. 3:10). It is like Ephraim (meaning 'fruitfulness!') who was a cake not turned (Hosea 7:8).

WHY WAS PAUL IN PRISON?

Paul Forsaken

In 2 Tim. 1:15-18 the Spirit of God is pleased to give us the fact that Paul was forsaken by Christians before He gives us the other departures which are found in this epistle. And, no doubt, these departures have a link;

there is a progression to be found in what is unfolded in 2 Timothy, just as there is a plan to all the books found in the Word of God. Note that the turning away was from the apostle Paul (v. 15) and not from Christ. Had they apostatized from Christ, Paul could hardly say "turned away from me". The Spirit of God would never lift Paul to such a place if they had apostatized from Christ. Rather, they were ashamed of his chain (v. 16) and didn't care to partake in the rejection and shame. The truth of the church, "the mystery of the gospel" (Eph. 6:19), was given up by these saints. They rejected what is sometimes called "Paul's doctrine". However, this departure also applies to the gospel. The apostle Paul had received a special revelation about the gospel. There was something added to what the other apostles preached (Gal. 1:12, 13) and it concerned that which he calls "my gospel" (Rom. 2:16; 16:25; 2 Tim. 2:8). He not only preached what we find in the beginning of the Acts, namely that Jesus was raised from the dead and made both Lord and Christ, and that the forgiveness of sins was available, which is about as far as the bulk of the gospel preaching seems to go today (and which was right in its time), but more has been given. The gospel which Paul preached involves the glorification of God with respect to the question of sin, and our association with the glorified Man at the right hand of God. And this is related to the Assembly, "the mystery of the gospel". It is very much more comprehensive than what was preached by the twelve at first. So it is not only church truth which has been given up by Christendom, but also what Paul calls "my gospel", i.e. that portion of what we preach that was given to Paul in addition to what others preached (except, perhaps, justification). As has been pointed out, the assembly has become married to the world as seen in Pergamos (Rev. 2:12-17), and so, generally, the path of separation from all things that are in the world system has been lost; and that is what we have in its beginning in the departure noticed in 2 Tim. 1.

In view of this departure from much truth committed to him, Paul exhorts Timothy to be not ashamed of the testimony of our Lord. Let us consider at this point "the testimony of our Lord". What is that? It is not what we say about the Lord. If it were what we say about Him,

then it would be **our** testimony. But it is **His** testimony, i.e. it is what **He** said. And it was that special line of things committed to Paul, as we see from Acts 26:16. Had he seen anything special? Indeed; he had seen the Lord in **the glory**, which none other except Stephen had seen, and thus only Paul speaks of "the glad tidings of **the glory of the Christ**" (2 Cor. 4:4; hence the expression "my gospel"), and of the subsequent mysteries which were communicated to him, especially as found in Ephesians. But people were saved by gospel preaching before Paul was saved: therefore "Paul's doctrine" is not necessary for salvation! This leads to a noteworthy consideration. Timothy was not to be ashamed of him who was a prisoner, a prisoner not only for the gospel but for the mystery of Christ as well (2 Tim. 1:8; Col. 4:3, 4). Onesiphorus was not ashamed to be identified with Paul (2 Tim 1:16), but Phygellus and Hermogenes, and many more, turned away from him. One may give up "Paul's doctrine" and still be orthodox. And when we say orthodox we mean sound in the fundamentals of the faith. The word 'fundamentalism' is one which came out, it seems, about 1905, and the word 'fundamentalist' was used to describe those who faithfully resisted modernism about 1920. What is meant by a fundamentalist (some want to be known as 'neo-evangelicals' now because the fundamentalists were not, generally speaking, so learned and intellectual as their opposers and the word now has connotations of opprobrium) is one who is orthodox as to the faith and owns the absolute authority of God's Word. We may have no doubt that the saints referred to in 2 Tim. 1:15 were professed Christians, at any rate, and perhaps 'fundamentalists' too; or they may have been 'evangelical Christians'. They turned away from that precious truth which will cause us to see God's portion and glory and turned away from the path of rejection and of really giving the Holy Spirit His place amongst God's people, Who desires to separate us from the intrusion of the will of man. The mass of Christendom is still in the Asia position. "The point of departure is the point of recovery."

"All who are in Asia . . . have turned away from me." This is a general statement. It was a general defection, but there were exceptions. Phygellus and Hermogenes serve as examples of those who, though saved, do not

value abiding by Paul's ministry about "my gospel and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery". Onesiphorus was a happy exception and Paul points out in 2 Tim.1:18 that Onesiphorus' ministry to himself was at Ephesus. No doubt this was Onesiphorus' home assembly; it was one of those assemblies in Asia, though in a small minority, which stood fast.

The meaning of the names of these three as found in J. B. Jackson's Dictionary of Proper Names is very interesting. Phygellus means "a little fugitive". Hermogenes means "lucky born". May we not learn the following lesson from their names? They were those who were rejoicing in their salvation, which is good, which is proper; but, alas, it seems that this is about as far as it went. They were rejoicing in their portion (as fugitives from God who had become born-again) which is right, but that is not the whole matter. What about God's portion, especially in the midst of His gathered saints? Onesiphorus, on the other hand, means "profit bringer", and pictures to us those who seek to give God His portion and His place. Let us, beloved reader, walk according to the truth of the gospel and the "mystery of the gospel", i.e. the truth of the assembly (Eph.6), and in our service for our Lord Jesus let us ever keep both of these things in mind; and when we desire to have fellow servants in the Lord's work let us ever seek fellowship in service with those who walk according to both of these things.

Paul in Prison

At first thought we would think that he was in prison because of the gospel. While that is true (Phil. 1:12-18; 2 Tim. 2:8,9) it is only part of the matter and this again will show how the gospel and the mystery are linked together. Is it a strange thought to say that Paul was in prison on account of the mystery of Christ, which Ephesians 3 shows goes far beyond the gospel? Let us hear the Word of God. "Praying at the same time for us also, that God may open to us a door of the word to speak the mystery of Christ, on account of which I am also bound, to the end that I may make it manifest as I ought to speak" (Col. 4:3,4). Not only is he in prison for the mystery of Christ, but he desires prayer that a door will be opened to speak, what — the gospel? Of course, but

that is not the point in this scripture. It is the mystery of Christ! No doubt he has also in mind the gospel because that is the blessed appointed **means** (Eph. 3:6) by which souls participate in the mystery of Christ. But the Word of God does not put these things in several compartments, disconnecting or disjointing them, as we are prone to do. Consider how beautifully these two things (which are distinguished but not to be disjointed) are linked together in Eph. 6:19,20, — “the mystery of the gospel”. The fact that sins would be forgiven was not a mystery hidden in ages past. It was no secret that a Redeemer and Saviour was coming Who would save His people from their sins and that blessing would go out to Gentiles. It was no secret that One was to suffer and see of the fruit of the travail of His soul. The mystery spoken of in Ephesians 6 is the mystery of Ephesians 3, that we should be joint-heirs and joint-body and joint-partakers of His promise in Christ Jesus. This is the mystery, or an intimate part of it, but so intimate is its connection with the glad tidings that is said to be “the mystery of the gospel”. Some one has said that this phrase sets forth the “full doctrine of grace in the calling of the church.”

Why was Paul in prison? Eph. 6:19,20 says that Paul was “an ambassador bound with a chain for the mystery of the gospel”. And he desires prayers of the saints that he may have utterance and boldness to set forth these glories. The fulness of the purpose of God was revealed to Paul. This purpose (never before revealed) included Gentiles. The Jews (Acts 22:21) would not have it that Gentiles should be so blessed; away with the bearer of such grace to Gentile dogs! Thus he went to prison because he preached this truth of great blessing for the Gentiles. Therefore with meditation on the point, we may understand Eph. 3:1, 2 and 13. And where was Paul now? What! preach such things in prison? Ah, the apostle knew how to serve God acceptably. Say, dear reader, do your associations in service restrain you from the “preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery” (Rom. 16:25) and from “enlightening all with what is the administration of the mystery”? God expects from us faithfulness in service. Eph. 3:10 says the unfolding of God’s all-various wisdom is through the assembly. Is the assembly connected somehow in our

thoughts with all that we do? Is God's glory in His House our object? Or are we half-job servants? Fellowship in service should reflect the connection between the gospel and the mystery.

An Example in Scripture of Gospel Truth & Church Truth Disjointed

We have already noted this; this is what those in Asia, who turned away from Paul did. They disjointed the gospel from the mystery. One can preach Jesus made both Lord and Christ, and exalted, and that forgiveness of sins accrues to the sinner when he trusts Christ, believe in the verbal inspiration of scripture and be sound on the Person of Christ, etc., be a "fundamentalist" or "evangelical", and still be one who has forsaken Paul, not endeavouring to embrace "the testimony of the Lord" (which is what the Lord told Paul from the glory). One can be sound as to the "fundamentals", be very active and zealous, but be a half-job servant, and at the same time decry those who do not occupy themselves in the same way.

SERVICE

Gospel Preaching is a Service to God

"But ye know the proof of him, that, as a child a father, he has **served** with me in the work of the glad tidings" (Phil. 2:22). It hardly needs to be said that gospel preaching is a service to God, but we need to remind ourselves at this point.

Service is Linked with the Body of Christ

Service has two aspects: one aspect is that of the kingdom (Matt. 25:14-30, etc.) which we will not consider now; the other aspect is the connection with the body of Christ. "There are distinctions of services, and the same Lord" (1 Cor. 12:5). "... evangelists ... with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ" (Eph. 4:12). Someone said, "We need, then, to have both these aspects of fellowship and testimony, i.e. assembly fellowship and gospel testimony. Both are to be maintained — not as independent of each other, but rather as going hand in hand unitedly. The evangelist therefore is not to consider himself independent of the assembly's testimony any more than the other 'gifts', as pastor or teacher. For

they are all given 'for the perfecting of the saints; with a view to the work of the ministry, with a view to the edifying of the body of Christ' (Eph. 4:11, 12). The evangelist's work is to have not only the salvation of souls in view, but also the relation of that work to the assembly where the converts are to be nurtured in the ways of the Lord, for their perfecting and edifying. And those who go forth to fill a public place in this way are to do so not as ordained of men, nor yet as self-ordained, which is still worse, but as sent by the Lord, from the assembly which recognizes them as fit for such work (Acts 13:1-3; 14:26; 15:40). Again, if the work of the evangelist has in view not only the preaching to the sinner, but also what Eph. 4 speaks of, does it not imply that he needs to have a measure of experience and understanding of what will help to perfect and edify? This it would seem could only be obtained by a period of association with an assembly, during which a real knowledge of the ways of the Lord may be acquired. In such association, one gifted as an evangelist would certainly manifest this calling in activities along such lines which would mark him as gifted for it. Then, if wider fields of service are opened, he goes forth commended by and with the fellowship of the saints."

This matter of the relationship of the evangelist to the assembly applies equally to all who do the work of an evangelist whether they are distinctly so gifted or not. This service is definitely linked with the edifying of the body of Christ.

Let this service be carried out in fellowship with those who preach Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery (Rom. 16:25; 1 Thes. 1:8). Let it go forth in fellowship with those who desire to enlighten all with the knowledge of what is the administration of the mystery (Eph. 3:9) and who desire to put this into practice according to the principles vital to maintaining practical holiness in the House of God.

Let those who lament lack of gospel effort set the example in this. Let all who are engaged in this and all who desire to give time to definite work in the gospel see that their work honors God as to the end in view, that it be not only the salvation of souls, but that souls are brought into the good of the "mystery of Christ". And let those who seem to like things done on the grand,

grand scale, with trump, flourish and fanfare, remember two things:

1. Many last shall be first and many first shall be last (Mark 10:31).

2. The Word of God says, Well done, thou good and faithful, not successful, servant (Matt 25:23).

FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship in the Family of God

An important distinction to observe is that fellowship in the family of God is one line of truth and assembly fellowship is another line of truth. The family of God is a subject of John's Gospel and epistles, whereas the assembly is a subject of Paul's epistles. We are not only members of the body of Christ, but we are also children in God's family, and these are two different things. Not all of God's children were in the body of Christ. Old Testament saints had life: they were born of God, and also saints during the millennium will be born of God. There were children of God before the cross, though they could not take that place until Christ came and was received (John 1:11, 12, cf. Gal.4:1-3).

The Lord spoke about new birth to Nicodemus, a Jew, before the work on the cross was accomplished, and asked him why he didn't know about the new birth. So we see that new birth is not distinctively a Christian truth, for then how could Nicodemus be expected to know about it? Here briefly are several scriptures which show that Old Testament saints were born of God, were "children" of God, and it will pay the reader to look into them so that it will be clear in his mind. In John 11:52 the prophecy of Caiaphas is that the Lord Jesus would die; but it is added that He would die that He might gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad. When were they scattered abroad? Why, before the Lord died; because He died that they might be gathered together in one. And who were they He was to gather together in one? The scattered "children of God"; so we see that there were children of God before the cross. Rom. 9:7,8, also shows this, as does Galatians.

A person becomes a child of God by being born into God's family, that is, he is born again. A person needs

something beyond this to be a member of the body of Christ (1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 1:13, 14).

In 1 John 1:3 it says, "that which we have seen and heard we report to you, that ye also may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is indeed with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." This is the fellowship of the family of God. The thought is not that we sit down and talk to one another. This fellowship is—having in common and in communion with the Father and the Son their nature and life. We have eternal life; and Peter shows that we are made partakers of the divine nature. We have a nature like God. This is what the fellowship is; that we enjoy this in common and in communion with the Father and the Son and, according to verse 7, with one another. When we are born again, i.e. born into God's family, He is our Father and we receive His life, eternal life (1 John 5:11, 12, 20; John 17:3), and also His nature, a divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).

It should be noted that verse 7 says "If we walk **in** the light as He is in the light". It does not say, "if we walk **according** to the light"; it says, "if we walk **in** the light". This is talking about position, standing, where we walk. **EVERY CHRISTIAN WALKS IN THE LIGHT.** If you picture yourself in a room and the light is on and you are walking around, you are walking in the light. It is not a question of **how** you are doing it, but **where** you are doing it. But if you turn the light switch to off, then you are walking in darkness. Every Christian walks in the light as God is in the light. And He is the light—perfect, pure, spotless. And so now God's children, as being partakers of the divine nature and life of the Father and the Son, walk in the light as He is in the light; and, we have fellowship in this divine life and nature which we have in communion with the Father and the Son, i.e. this fellowship is the sharing of this in common with other children of God. But this is family fellowship. God ever had a family since the first soul on earth was born again in the Old Testament times (though they did not know God as Father; this awaited the revelation of the Father by the Son.) They did not have the knowledge of these things nor the indwelling Spirit. 1 John 1:4 says, "And these things write we to you that your joy may be full." So we can have fulness of joy by this epistle's explaining about the life and nature

that we have with the Father and the Son, and have power to enjoy them in fulness by the indwelling Spirit.² The Old Testament saints could not take the place of children and so John 1:12 says, "But as many as received him, to them gave he [the] right to be children of God," i.e. to take that place openly, and we can enjoy it and our joy be full in this participation in the nature of the Father and the Son.

It might be well to mention something about oneness in John's Gospel. When the Lord prayed that the disciples might be one, we should be aware that He is referring to the family of God, not the one body. The truth of the body of Christ was reserved for later revelation through Paul. Then what is this oneness? It is this. The children of God had been scattered abroad, as we have seen. Now they could take the place of children openly (John 1:13). They had the same nature and life, the same desires God-ward. The Lord prayed that this life and nature be displayed by the family as a visible company. One, in life and nature, let them live it practically, openly, and in acknowledged relationship as children of God.

The Fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ

Now if we turn to 1 Cor. 1:9 we find that we have been called **into** the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. In the first epistle of John we note that our fellowship was **with** the Father and the Son (Father first because the thought is the family): it was something we enjoyed in common and in communion **with** Them and with one another; but here it is the fellowship **into** which we have been called. This fellowship (1 Cor. 1:9) is that of the body of Christ. At this point we may observe a very important thing, namely, that since this fellowship is different from fellowship in the family of God, then **being a child of God is not the basis of Christian fellowship**, for if it were, then all Old Testament saints, who were in the family of God, i.e. who were born of God, would be in Christian fellowship. Abraham, for example, Noah, David, and many others would be in the Christian fellowship, but we know that this is not true; yet they were children of God, they were in God's family. Gal. 4:1-3 describes the position of Jews who were children of God. So it is very important to see that there are these two fellowships, that of the family of God³ and

that of the assembly of God; and we know that every Christian is in the family of God, but not everyone that has ever been in the family of God is in the Christian fellowship. Christian fellowship began on the day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit came down and united the children of God to the Head in heaven and formed them as the body of Christ on earth. The disciples were children of God before they were baptized in the Spirit into one body on the day recorded in Acts 2.

John sets forth the truth of being children, and our relationship to the Father, and the family characteristics, whereas Paul's line is more that we are sons and so he sets forth our position in regard to the highest aspect of that which God is doing according to His eternal purpose (Eph. 1 and 3).

But that should be stressed, because the reader must lay hold of the fact that new birth, i.e. having life, is not the basis of Christian fellowship, for if it were, Old Testament saints would be in the Christian fellowship because they had life. Having life, i.e. being born of God, and so becoming a child of God, does not make a person a Christian (baptism in the Spirit—1 Cor. 12:13—formed the one body, and we are joined to this body when we receive the Spirit as the seal), and therefore that cannot be the basis of the Christian fellowship, though of course it must also be true that to be in the Christian fellowship a person must be born of God; but that is not the end and conclusion of the matter.

How May We Apply these Truths as to Fellowship?

Just because a person has life doesn't mean that we are to go along in fellowship in the assembly or fellowship in service with such. Life, as seen, is necessary, but it is something else that formed the Christian fellowship (1 Cor. 12:13) and so other considerations besides life are important when considering assembly fellowship and fellowship in service.

There is also a distinction between **service towards** others and **service with** others. Our hearts must go out to embrace all the children of God for they are all loved by Him and we love them all and we may be of **service towards** all of them; but that does not mean that we must **serve with** all of them, for many are in an unscriptural position and compromise the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery, not

holding fast the principles governing the proper expression of the fellowship of 1 Corinthians 1. The Holy Spirit as the Indweller of the House of God and of the saints is often ignored and quenched by principle⁴ in Christendom. And we have seen by now that all work in the gospel must be linked with these truths and should have them in view. When we labor with others in the gospel, they will be those with whom we are walking and who have the same desire to set forth the truth of the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord, into which we have been called. How can we fellowship in service with those who do not with us desire that God shall have His rights in His house??? How could anyone feel free to fellowship in service with those with whom we do not break bread, because in the breaking of bread we find the highest expression of fellowship according to 1 Cor. 10. We must put first things first, and God's order in His House, and His portion in the midst of His gathered saints, comes first and nothing must compromise that. And the Holy Spirit Who has formed the Christian fellowship must be given His due liberty in principle and practice.

Phil. 1:5 shows that there is such a thing as fellowship in the gospel. How is it that any could associate in gospel work with those who do not walk with us in the path of separation? who do not take into account the preaching of Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery? who do not seek to enlighten others with what is the knowledge of the administration of the mystery? who do not desire fellowship according to the principles of holiness in life (1 Cor. 5), doctrine (Gal. 5; 2 John), and associations (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 5; 2 John 9, 10; 2 Tim. 2; Luke 12:51, 52; Rev. 2:14, 15; Lev. 13:15; Judg. 20, 21; Hag. 2:10; Josh. 7:11; 2 Cor. 6:17).

We find that, in connection with the breaking of bread, 1 Cor. 10 precedes 1 Cor. 11. 1 Cor. 11 gives us our actual remembrance of the Lord; but chapter 10, which precedes it, sets forth the Lord's table as it involves our associations. That is very important to God. He brings that before us first, before the actual remembrance. See Acts 2 where the Spirit's filling the house is mentioned before the filling of the saints. Note also the Corinthians were told that they collectively were the temple of God (1 Cor. 3) before they were told

that individually their bodies were temples of the Spirit (1 Cor. 6). The point to this is that God is very careful to keep collective responsibility before us, who are prone to always think of ourselves first. Both are important, of course.

Our fellowship must always be true to the administration of the mystery of Christ. That comes first, for it is from that truth that assembly fellowship derives its proper character. The Lord told Paul, at the time that he was saved, that He had called him to be a witness concerning what he had seen and heard and in that in which He would appear to him, and there and then he received a hint about the body of Christ. Therefore our witness, our fellowship, must ever have that in mind. Many of the children of God are in an unscriptural position and our efforts should be **towards them, not with them**, and we should desire to help them, to enlighten them to see what is the administration of the mystery; but certainly it is incongruous to serve in fellowship in the gospel when with them we cannot fully preach Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery. Preaching and practising this will cause separation.

The saints at the beginning of the dispensation continued steadfastly in the apostles' fellowship (Acts 2:42), but it did not take many years before we find that was not the only fellowship (2 Tim. 1). We know that there were those in Asia who turned away from the apostle Paul (the condition of many saints today). Many of God's saints therefore had another "fellowship"; they were no longer in the fellowship of the apostle. His was a dual ministry, but they were satisfied to be like Phygellus and Hermogenes. There are many such saints today who rejoice that though they were fugitives from God, now they are born again and are happy and rejoice in it; but that is certainly not the end of the matter because in effect they have forsaken the apostle Paul and therefore we cannot link up in fellowship in service with such. Imagine if Timothy had gone to Asia and linked up in the preaching of the gospel with such as had forsaken the apostle Paul who was in prison not only for the gospel, but as an ambassador in chains for the mystery of Christ, the mystery of the gospel. It is a throwing things into confusion fraught with dire consequences to

pursue such a course. We must needs recognize that division exists and the "point of departure is the point of recovery". Are we going to abandon this truth? It is true that there are those in God's family not in assembly fellowship with whom we converse on scriptural subjects. They enjoy the same life and nature that we do, but service with them is altogether another matter.

The following remark is helpful: "We must maintain obedience to divine principles even though it separates us from many who are truly our brethren in Christ if we wish to be in fellowship with the apostle. His position was a distinct testimony against the departure of brethren, and so must ours be. Under the condition of the day, our responsibility is to 'follow righteousness, faith, love, peace with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart'—a limited fellowship." Another has said: "Fellowship to be blessed must be fellowship in the truth and for the truth's sake." Dear reader, never let us ignore the highest expression of fellowship to partake in common service. I would close this section by quoting still another: "1 Cor. 1:9 is a fellowship that applies to the house of God. It has to do with its constitution as Paul laid it down by the same teaching (1 Cor. 4:17) everywhere and the same customs (7:17; 11:16). It was Paul's administration to do this (Eph. 3:2) and he laid the foundation (1 Cor. 3:10)." Now let us ask ourselves if all of our service to the Lord takes these things into account and gives them their proper place that God may be honored and glorified; that we mean to show Him that we think more of His interests in His house than we do of fellowshiping in service with our brethren who do not give Him His rights and His portion in the midst of His gathered saints.

TWO RESULTS of FALSE FELLOWSHIP IN SERVICE

The Truth is Compromised

If one is serving in the gospel with one who does not walk in the practice of the fellowship of the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), he often cannot be faithful with the converts, as he should, because the one with whom he serves also has something to say about where the convert should go. This is the reason why converts are told, at some so-

called “revivals” and/or “crusades”, to go to the church of their choice. (This is really lawlessness, because we are bound to tell all to submit to the will of God, not to please themselves.) One must take into account those with whom one has linked oneself.

We Will Slip Away from the Truth

This has generally been the tendency of serving in the gospel with those with whom one does not give expression to the truth of the one body and the order of God’s house. The truth is compromised, no doubt unintentionally at first, and soon there is a moral adjustment in the soul as one becomes used to such a course. Truth loses its value and hold upon the soul. It is a subtle thing, sometimes proceeding imperceptibly. Finally there is departure from what was once held and practised; and those who once gave the Lord in the midst of His gathered saints His portion become occupied with service and they begin to say, “Well, the **really** important thing is that we get the gospel out.” While it is VERY important, yet such an attitude puts first things second and second things first, and ignores the intimate link between the gospel and the mystery of Christ, compromises truth, and the tendency is to render the truth powerless in the soul of the convert and the worker in the gospel. Soon one’s feet follow the new leanings of one’s heart.

Someone said, “I leave every person to his own conscience as to places where he may be free to evangelize. At first I preached in every church or chapel where I was permitted; but I found it was not a good plan. If I saw a man preaching the gospel honestly or fully in the streets and there was opposition, I could identify myself with him without asking who he was or where he came from; but this is a different thing from planning to go out with him. I could not; but leave every person free. You cannot control any man’s conscience; you may advise him. I do not conceal that I am outside the camp, altogether and totally, and I think I know what I am about from Scripture. If I go there, I mix myself up with what is in the camp, altogether and totally, and I give an uncertain sound. My deliberate judgment is that in the state of the church of God one should be outside these connections. I think it is all going on to judgment as fast as it can, and it is not charity to go on with it so as to enfeeble

the testimony. I have seen it going on these forty or fifty years nearly, with persons attempting to go on with it; and I have never seen such persons either grow into the truth or make others clear in their walk. After an experience of nearly fifty years I am perfectly clear in my judgment about it." (The Bible Treasury, vol. X, pp. 121, 122)

OUR CALLING AND THE EVANGELIST'S SERVICE

The following is a reprint of an article appearing in "Things New and Old", (Woodbridge, N.J.) April 1971: "Preaching the Gospel"

"I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God" (Acts 20:27).

I hear there is a question, how far we ought to cooperate with other saints, with whom we are not ecclesiastically in communion, in preaching the Gospel. The question would never arise, in my judgment, were those called "brethren" alive to the peculiar position and testimony to which they are committed. We are, properly speaking, a remnant through grace, led to see the proper calling of the Church. We are essentially a few who have emerged out of the general departure which broke out extensively, when "All in Asia" have turned away from Paul. (2nd Tim. 1:15). There was a general defection from the truth committed to Paul and that has continued for several hundred years. Now God, in His infinite mercy, has enlightened some of us to see how we had fallen, and we have received in measure the light and the truth which were given to the Church at first. We are not merely an improvement on the sections in Christendom. We are, or we purpose to be, the only company of saints who contend for the truth committed to the Apostle of the Gentiles, our apostle. (Rom. 11:13).

Our calling, characteristically, is ecclesiastical rather than evangelical. We are called to set forth to our fellow saints the vocation wherewith we are called. I do not say we are not to evangelise, far from it, but I do say that in my judgment, it is not our greatest duty. The evangelist among us who forgets the ecclesiastical colours, as I might say, which he has assumed, **departs from the**

highest favour now conferred by God. I hold that enlightenment as to what is due to Christ by His body on earth is the greatest favour, next to conversion, given of God, in this day. I feel and am assured that the evangelist among us has a much higher duty than even fulfilling the duties and functions of his gift. He is, in a different position to the evangelists who are in the thick of "All in Asia" still. He has been led to revert to the testimony of the Lord and His prisoner, and this badge or color he must wear more conspicuously than any other. He is an evangelist who openly and avowedly repudiates the course of "All in Asia" and in ————too, because before he will enter on the duties of his gift, he will insist that he is a revivalist in the true sense of the word, that he is not ashamed of the testimony of the Lord, and of me His prisoner. (2nd Tim. 1:8, 13, 14.) He comes with Paul's doctrine, this cannot be compromised, this must first and foremost be owned and guarded. If there be any question or hesitation about this, he will demur, he retires, as the flower refuses to unfold or express its fragrance when the day is wintry and chilly.

He desires to do his duty as an evangelist, and every saint loving the Lord would gladly aid him; but neither he nor they that have received light as to the claims of Christ upon them, for Himself, as His body on earth, will consent, much less offer to cooperate with "All in Asia". They wish to serve, to break the enemy's lines, but they will not consent to wear plain clothes; they are too loyal for that. If they are not accepted in their true colors, and their proper regimentals, and armour, they prefer (however insignificant it may make them appear) to be unattached, or at least only a little garrison.

It is, I say with deep and deepening conviction, a departure from our highest duty and allegiance to Christ, to cooperate with those opposed to, or ignorant of, what is due to Him on earth, in order to bless man. Man is thus preferred to Christ and souls are hindered and checked by their own unfaithfulness. I should not hinder others from doing what they could, but I must not pull down my colors to assist them, and thus neutralize my higher duty.

CONCLUSION AND APPLICATION

The conclusion of all that has been said must, by now, be clear. The Word of God intimately links the Gospel and the mystery of Christ. May we be faithful, beloved of the Lord, to render to Him that obedience which shows that we love Him and ministers joy to His heart. Only so will the Father have that praise and worship from His gathered saints which is His due.

The writer would rather leave the reader to make the application himself. However, it has been found that some saints appreciate and need help in the application of various truths and therefore these remarks are added. There is no desire to offend anyone. If that were the object, this end could be realized with a much shorter paper than this. But the desire is that first the interests of our Lord Jesus Christ might be served, and then that His dear saints might be helped.

The following remarks are not made to deny that the groups mentioned do anything acceptable to the Lord. He is the ultimate Judge of what He will reward. He will find that which is praiseworthy (1 Cor. 4:5). We are concerned here about the principles and basis upon which service is carried out and since this is given in the Word we are obliged to discern whether the principles be true or false and not join with what is false at the root. The business of those in Ezra and Nehemiah's day was to work in connection with the place God had chosen to put His name there and not to be running to Babylon (confusion) where many of their brethren were. This has nothing to do with whether or not we love them. If we love them, we will obey the Word of God (1 John 5:2).

A snare especially for younger saints going to college is the **Inter Varsity Christian Fellowship**. This "Fellowship" is not the fellowship of 1 Cor. 1:9 and 1 Cor. 10. But I have no wish to berate any work. However, let US follow scriptural order. Beloved saints of God, let us just leave the IVCF to go about its business and let us go about following the Word of God. We have seen that we cannot be satisfied with only seeing souls saved and given help in matters of personal piety (although that is in rapid decline also). God's claims go beyond that and we have seen that these are intimately linked with the gospel, and so all our gospel work must take this into account.

Another snare is the **Christian Business Men's Association**. This association is not the fellowship of 1 Cor. 1:9 and 1 Cor. 10. Let us also leave that where it is and go about following God's Word according to the truths that have been discussed. Is God honored as to the mystery of Christ in such an "association"? Will anyone affirm it? How then may we continue on with it if it is not faithful to this?

Also there are the "revivals" and "crusades" in which many Christians in a community are supposed to forget their ecclesiastical differences and work together for the salvation of many. It is astounding what is thrown together in this melting pot; not only those who do not walk according to the mystery of Christ, but oft times blasphemers and antichrists are joined in such work. We know of such crusades concerning which it is a matter of common knowledge to the Christian community that antichrists (1 John 4:3 and 2 John 7; also 2 John 9-11) as well as those who come under the anathema of Gal. 1:8, were associated with this gospel work. But even where such flagrant compromise of purity in associations is not present, there is the important matter of preaching Jesus Christ according to the revelation of the mystery.

Youth for Christ and **Child Evangelism** organizations and other kinds of societies, while working for some particular end, fall short, not just in practice, which we all do, but in principle. Failure on right ground (not to be excused, but judged) is one thing. Let all who desire to honor God's claims over His House see that all labor for the Lord in which they are engaged, or which they support, is according to the order and constitution of that House.

Also, bear with this suggestion: would it not be well to use tracts for distribution which contain the name and address of one with whom we are expressing the truth that "there is one body"? —because we want to see that souls who are saved are led on in that which is intimately connected with the gospel. Some write for help and it would be well to supply a helpful address.

May our blessed God lead us into more knowledge of His will and zeal according to knowledge.

FOOTNOTES

¹Obtainable from the publisher.

²Old Testament saints had divine life from God, but “life in the Son” is a Christian blessing.

³Of course, the truth and privileges of the family are now known and enjoyed in the power of God’s Spirit as they could not be in the Old Testament times when the children were, as it were, in their minority and under law. See Galatians.

⁴That is, because of the false principles at work.