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## CHURCH LIFE AND RELATIONSHIPS

WHEN GOD UNITED US WITH CHRIST, HE ALSO UNITED US WITH ALL OTHER BELIEVERS IN HIS BODY. IN THIS LESSON WE WILL LOOK AT THE CONTEXT IN WHICH THESE RELATIONSHIPS ARE PRACTICALLY WORKED OUT. WE WILL ALSO SEE WHY THESE RELATIONSHIPS ARE IMPORTANT AND WHAT ESSENTIAL CHARACTER QUALITIES WE NEED TO MAKE THEM WORK.

### I. THE CHURCH AS COMMUNITY

The church is not primarily an organization or structure but people. People who have been chosen by God, experienced regeneration, and are being built together by Him to help fulfill His purposes and bring glory to his name. But how do people relate with one another? The New Testament picture of the church (Acts 2:42-47) can best be described as community - a unified body of people with common characteristics, interests, values, and purpose living together within a larger society. This is the type of church life that we are to strive for in the local church.

### II. FELLOWSHIP

If the lifestyle of the church is best described as community, our relating with one another within that community is best described by the word fellowship. Fellowship expresses the idea of sharing or having something in common with somebody else. The word translated fellowship in the New Testament is also translated as participation, partnership, and communion. In essence it means to share a common life. It includes:

#### A. Sharing Our Common Life In Christ

This is the highest level of fellowship. It involves sharing with fellow Christians what God has revealed to us with the hope of edifying them and seeking to be edified by their experiences as well.

*1 John 1:3,5 "We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. <sup>5</sup> This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."*

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*Romans 1:11-12 "I long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong - <sup>12</sup> that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith."*

#### B. Sharing Our Material Possessions

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This aspect of fellowship is summarized in Acts chapters 2 and 4 - "All the believers were together and had everything in common," (Acts 2:44) and "there were no needy persons among them" (Acts 4:34). Their commitment to each other was such that when another was in need the entire community responded to meet that need in very practical ways. This includes not only giving our possessions, but our time and abilities in service to others.

*Romans 12:13a "Share with God's people who are in need."*

*Hebrews 13:16 "And do not forget to do good and to share with others, for with such sacrifices God is pleased."*

## C. Sharing In Daily Life

The early church members were friends. They practiced hospitality and enjoyed one another's company in the course of daily living. This daily interaction was the context for much of the fellowship mentioned in point A above, as well as for much service and ministry that would occur outside the confines of a church meeting.

## III. UNDERSTANDING FELLOWSHIP

We fellowship because we need each other. God said, "It is not good for the man to be alone" (Genesis 2:18). Paul expresses this need in the analogies of the body in 1 Corinthians 12:14-21 and Romans 12:4-8. We need each other for a variety of different reasons. These reasons are well summarized by Solomon in Ecclesiastes.

*Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 "Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their work: <sup>10</sup> If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! <sup>11</sup> Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup> Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

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### A. Effective Labor

*Ecclesiastes 4:9b "...they have a good return for their work..."*

The purpose of the church includes edification or building up the body of Christ and outreach, especially witness to the world. Our relationships are a powerful tool in accomplishing both of these goals.

#### 1. Maturity

We are built up as we are built together. This includes both personal character development and bringing the body to maturity through the diversity of gifts in the church.

a. Character development. Our involvement with others provides two avenues for growth in

- a. Character development. Our involvement with others provides two avenues for growth in holiness. First, we are to take purposeful efforts to help one another grow and resist sin through regular and ongoing encouragement. This provides a context of trust and love. Secondly, our interaction with others both exposes our sins and gives us an opportunity to practice godly virtues. These can only happen as we regularly interact with those to whom we are mutually committed. As someone has said, "One can acquire anything in solitude except character."

*Hebrews 3:13 "But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness."*

*Proverbs 27:17 "As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens another."*

- b. Diversity of gifts. The Holy Spirit distributes gifts to build the church. No one person has all the gifts necessary, but each one is given a gift that contributes to the common good. We need one another and the gifts each brings to mature corporately.

*1 Corinthians 12:7 "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good."*

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*Ephesians 4:11-13 "It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, <sup>12</sup> to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up <sup>13</sup> until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."*

*Ephesians 4:16 "From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work."*

## 2. Witness

As important as our individual efforts in evangelism are, we must realize that those efforts are not our only witness. One of the most powerful witnesses we give to the world is our unity and love for one another in the church.

*John 13:35 "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another."*

*John 17:20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, <sup>21</sup> that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."*

## B. Support

*Ecclesiastes 4:10 "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"*

*Ecclesiastes 4:10 "If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up!"*

Life can be difficult. We struggle with sin - our own and others; and the effects of sin - death, sickness, sorrows, pain. We can grow tired, discouraged, fearful, etc. We need others to come alongside, support, and help us in such times.

*1 Corinthians 12:26 "If one part suffers, every part suffers with it; if one part is honored, every part rejoices with it."*

*Romans 12:15 "Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn."*

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We would identify five general areas where we are called to support one another.

1. Comfort the distressed.

To comfort means "to cheer, to ease the grief or troubles of."

*Galatians 6:2 "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."*

*Job 16:5 "But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief."*

*2 Corinthians 1:4 "who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God."*

2. Encourage the discouraged.

To encourage means "to inspire with courage, spirit, and hope; to hearten."

*1 Thessalonians 5:11 "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing."*

*Hebrews 10:24-25 "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. <sup>25</sup> Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another - and all the more as you see the Day approaching."*

3. Correct the sinful.

Correction can include confrontation when we are sinned against, mild admonition, or strong rebuke. The goal is **always** restoration of the sinner.

*Matthew 18:15 "If your brother sins against you, go and show him his fault, just between the two of you. If he listens to you, you have won your brother over."*

*Galatians 6:1 "Brothers, if someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently. But watch yourself, or you also may be tempted."*

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*James 5:16 "Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed."*

### 4. Help the weak.

This would include both material and spiritual help.

*1 Thessalonians 5:14b "help the weak..."*

*Romans 15:1 "We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves."*

*1 John 3:17-18 "If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? <sup>18</sup> Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."*

### 5. Counsel or teach the ignorant.

This would include sharing the wisdom, insight, and experience we have gained with those who need it. It is in a special way the job of leaders but in a general way the duty and privilege of all believers.

*Romans 15:14 "I myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another."*

*Colossians 3:16 "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God."*

## C. Protection

*Ecclesiastes 4:12 "Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken."*

Leaders are not the only ones who are called to watch over the flock. We are each called to watch over one another's lives to protect one another from sin, deceit, and foolishness by prayer, intervention, council, etc.

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*Luke 17:3 "So watch yourselves. If your brother sins, rebuke him, and if he repents, forgive him."*

*James 5:20 "remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins."*

*Romans 16:17 "I urge you, brothers, to watch out for those who cause divisions and put obstacles in your way that are contrary to the teaching you have learned. Keep away from them."*

*Ephesians 6:18 "And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints."*

**D. Companionship**

*Ecclesiastes 4:11 "Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone?"*

This verse speaks of our closest relationships. We are related with all in the local church but we can only be closely related with a few. These few will provide us with the most frequent and deepest fellowship.

*Proverbs 18:24 "A man of many companions may come to ruin, but there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother."*

**IV. ESSENTIAL QUALITIES FOR BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP**

The Bible contains a multitude of commands on how we are to treat one another. Four qualities stand out.

**A. Love**

Our entire duty toward our fellow man is summarized in the second greatest command - love your neighbor as you love yourself. Jesus expanded our understanding of what this meant in John 13:34 "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." What was new about this command was that, through the Holy Spirit, Jesus would enable his disciples to love one another and the world with the same love with which He Himself loved them. Paul describes this type of love for us in 1 Corinthians 13.

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*Romans 13:8 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."*

Romans 13:8 "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for he who loves his fellowman has fulfilled the law."

1 Peter 4:8 "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins."

1 John 4:7-8 "Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. <sup>8</sup> Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love."

1 John 4:20-21 "If anyone says, 'I love God,' yet hates his brother, he is a liar. For anyone who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen. <sup>21</sup> And he has given us this command: Whoever loves God must also love his brother."

1 John 3:18 "Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth."

Galatians 5:6 "For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision nor uncircumcision has any value. The only thing that counts is faith expressing itself through love."

Colossians 3:12-14 "Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. <sup>13</sup> Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. <sup>14</sup> And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity."

## B. Unity

Unity is more than a lack of strife. It is actively coming together around Jesus and His purpose for the church. It involves both building unity and resisting disunity.

Luke 11:17 "Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them: 'Any kingdom divided against itself will be ruined, and a house divided against itself will fall.'"

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### 1. Building Unity

Positively, unity says we are going to work together in love, respect, and mutual submission to glorify God in our mission and relationships. We may disagree on certain non-moral/disputable matters but we must be diligent to never allow division over anything. Unity also requires that we have an equal regard for all who are part of the church.

Philippians 2:1-2 "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, <sup>2</sup> then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose."

Ephesians 4:3 "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace"

1 Corinthians 1:10 "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of

*1 Corinthians 1:10 "Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace."*

*Galatians 3:28 "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus."*

*James 2:1 "My brothers, as believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ, don't show favoritism."*

*1 Corinthians 12:25 "so that there should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other."*

*Romans 12:16 "Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited."*

## 2. Resisting Disunity

Unity is not very difficult when things are going well. We are tested when we face challenges and difficulties as we inevitably do. These challenges can be caused by others sinning against us. And we can be challenged when our preferences are not followed. Maintaining unity at BRCC requires a commitment to walk in the light and discuss our differences with those directly involved in the problem

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and/or its solution. It also involves a commitment to forgive and resist sins like gossip, slander, bitterness, etc., which grieve the Holy Spirit and divide believers.

*Colossians 3:13 "Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you."*

*Galatians 5:15 "If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."*

*Ephesians 4:30-32 "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. <sup>31</sup> Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. <sup>32</sup> Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you."*

## C. Humility and Integrity

Humility is the quality necessary to open our lives up to one another. We must humble ourselves and be truthful in discussing the issues in our lives if we are to experience true fellowship. This means we must be willing to:

1. Confess our sins to one another to reveal who we really are so that others can truly know us and resist any impulses to hide or pretend to be something or someone we are not.

*1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."*



1 John 1:7 "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."

2. Both receive and express biblical correction and constructive criticism so we can help one another grow.

Colossians 3:16a "Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom."

Romans 15:14 (NASB) "And concerning you, my brethren, I myself also am convinced that you yourselves are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, and able also to admonish one another."

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3. Bless others through praise, encouragement, thanks, and other expressions of love and regard.
4. Live free of hypocrisy, being on the outside what we are on the inside and being in public what we are in private.

Colossians 3:9 "Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices."

Ephesians 4:15 "Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ."

## D. Commitment

Commitment means a pledge or promise to do something, in this case to faithfully walk out your relationship with God and His people in a local church until God would direct otherwise. Such a commitment is the biblical norm where believers didn't just attend a church but were "added to" (Acts 2:47b) and "devoted themselves to" it (Acts 2:42).

Like humility and integrity, commitment establishes trust which encourages us to open our hearts to one another, relate openly, and plan for the future together. It communicates we can count on one another in both good times and bad.

### Teaching Tapes Available for Further Study on Fellowship:

*Fellowship: A Means of Grace* – April 28, 1996

*Building Community Today* – August 22, 1999

*The Corporate Disciplines: Fellowship* – July 22, 2001

## V. SMALL GROUPS

Small groups at BRCC are a means for applying God's Word and expressing care as well as developing the kind of relationship we have talked about in this lesson. We have a general relationship with all

Small groups at BRCC are a means for applying God's Word and expressing care as well as developing the kind of relationship we have talked about in this lesson. We have a general relationship with all believers in the local church but we are able to relate more deeply with a smaller number of people. Participation in a small group is essential for anyone who wishes to receive the full benefit of membership in BRCC.

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**A. The Purpose of Small Groups**

1. Application of God's Word. Small group is a context where we apply God's word to our lives. We study the Bible, Sunday messages, Christian books, and a variety of other materials with the intention of growing in the grace and knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.
2. Fellowship. Small groups provide a place to get to know others on a more personal basis than we could on a Sunday morning. Out of these relationships then grows a love for and commitment to other members which will enable us to open up and share our life in God. Small groups also help us by giving us a context for serving within the church.
3. Ministry. Small groups are a place where we can both receive and learn to give ministry. Some meetings will include a time to pray for one another and to exercise spiritual gifts for edifying the individual or group.

**B. Our Responsibilities**

Each member of a group is important to the group and can add success by:

1. Faithfully attending meetings and functions.
2. Coming ready to contribute, having the homework assignment done.
3. Coming ready to share about yourself when appropriate.
4. Building relationships with other members outside of the meeting context.
5. Regularly praying for the other members of your group.
6. Reaching out to new people to add to your group.

**Teaching Tapes Available for Further Study on Small Groups:**  
*Why Small Groups Are A Big Deal – March 29, 1998*

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