

The purpose of this publication is to encourage God's people to lay hold on eternal life, the hope set before them, knowing that Jesus Christ, their Saviour, will soon return to establish His eternal Kingdom, "so that the name of our Lord Jesus may be glorified in you, and you in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ" (2 Thess. 1:12).



*the Golden
Candlestick*

FELLOWSHIP

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THE BASIS AND VALUES OF FELLOWSHIP

Reading: John 17:20-23; Acts 2:42-47; 1 Cor. 9:10; 2 Cor. 13:14.

Fellowship is a matter about which the Lord has expressed a desire. We do not have far to go to know that this is the will of the Lord. But that is not all. The Lord very often presents a matter in apparently simple language, but we must never think that because He does that the matter is a simple matter. We must remember that it depends entirely upon who it is who speaks as to the value of that which is said. There are those people whose words we do not take much account of, because we know the people, that is, we feel that we cannot take them very seriously, and therefore put down their utterances at a somewhat small value, discount what they say. But when we are dealing with the Lord we can never put things too high. The danger is always of not recognising how great is the thing which the Lord says.

There is this one premise which we can establish once and for all in relation to anything which comes from the Lord, that is, that it always carries a value and importance commensurate with such a One as He is. The Lord is never casual. The Lord is never merely sentimental. The Lord never says things for the sake of saying them, or for the time being. The Lord is eternal and infinite and universal, and everything which comes from the Lord takes its character from Him, and is therefore of eternal significance, of infinite value, of universal importance. We must adjust ourselves therefore to every matter with that in mind. And when we speak of fellowship we must never just feel that the Lord wants us to be on good terms with one another, to get along well together, and to have no friction because that is the nicest thing, the most pleasant thing, the happiest way of getting on. That is very small. It may be very good, but it is of dimensions much less than are worthy of God. When the Lord speaks about fellowship He has things of infinite meaning and value in His mind, in His thought, in the background of His utterances. We should be learning to approach everything in the Word of God on that

ground, that we never take anything just as it stands, but that we go behind the thing and see the vast range of divine significance, value and importance which lies behind what looks like the simplest thing, and until we do get behind things we have not the adequate impact of that thing to realise all that God has in mind. And if that is true of anything, it is true of the matter of fellowship.

In the Gospels it is presented quite simply, because it was not the regime, the dispensation of the Holy Spirit, and therefore men were not yet prepared to inwardly apprehend the full thought of God. By the Holy Spirit's *inward* illumination they came to apprehend the far greater meaning of these things, so that in the epistles we have the deeper meaning of fellowship opened to us.

I want to remind you that associated with one compound word in the epistles the greatest things with which we have to do are found. That is, the word "*together*". The prefix *συν* (Gk. "sun") is linked with all the most vital and far-reaching matters of our relationship with God. I just remind you of some of them, not to stay to study them but by way of emphasising how important this matter of our relationship in Christ is. We are carried back into the before times eternal with this word, and we are told that we were chosen or elected together in Christ before the world was. That is stated definitely in Ephesians 1:4 and in 1 Peter 5:13, so that fellowship is no incidental thing. It is not something which has just come in time, that we get on well together in this life. It dates back to the timeless counsels of God in eternity, and there together in Christ in those eternal counsels we were *chosen*. Get the force of this. It does not just say that we were chosen in Christ, and it does not say we were chosen together with Christ. It says that we were *chosen together in Christ*. That means that we were seen as one in Christ, *we* were together, not Jesus Christ and ourselves as individuals brought together, but brought together in Christ in the thought and intention of God from eternity. So that God's eternal thought before we came into being was a togetherness of His own. You can understand why the enemy takes such pains to destroy the fellowship of God's people if God has regarded this thing of such immense importance as to have it as a definite part of His plan, His thought-out intention, and purposed it from all eternity.

Then in time God's thought is brought into expression, and we are *called* together in Christ. Then all those things about this togetherness follow. We are said to have been *planted together* in the likeness of His death. That is not just planted together with Christ. It is planted together with one another in Christ in the likeness of His death. This was not an individualistic thing

merely. This was a collective thing. We are *all* together in the death of Christ. If we may use another word, we are banded together in the death of Christ. Then we have been *raised together* in Him. Our translation says "with" Him, but if you look in the Greek you will find that it is the little word *ἐν* (Gk. "in"). We were raised together *in* Him, not only with Him.

Then we are seated together in Him; gathered together into one; joined together; framed together; knit together; built together; loved together; workers together; with one mind striving together. It is that great togetherness of the people of God. And there is much more in the Word about that, but this is sufficient to bring home to our hearts something of the tremendous range, the many-sidedness and the infinite importance of fellowship, oneness, togetherness in Christ.

I want to try and gather that up in three or four very inclusive, far-reaching statements, that is, as to the great spiritual meanings of fellowship, as I see them, in the Word of the Lord. It will be a matter for further investigation and enquiry, and I trust you will follow it out.

The values of fellowship as revealed in the Word of the Lord

I. Fellowship related to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus

In the first place fellowship, or togetherness, is most clearly related to the exaltation of the Lord Jesus. To put that in other words, the Sovereign Headship of the Lord Jesus is immediately and intimately related to the fellowship of His people, or the fellowship of the Lord's people touches in the closest way the very Lordship of Christ, the very Headship of Christ, the very fact that He is Sovereign. That means, on the opposite side, that failure, breakdown, weakness in fellowship or anything like disintegration among the Lord's people — schism, division, strained relationships; anything like independence, separateness, detachment, isolation — touches the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus in a direct way, and takes from the glory of His Sovereign Headship.

When David was eventually brought to the throne in Jerusalem the great step, the crisis point of his coming to universal dominion was at Hebron. Hebron means fellowship, and it was there that we find that the throne for David came immediately into view, and it came in on this wise: "Then all Israel gathered to David at Hebron and said, Behold, we are your bone and your flesh. In times past, even when Saul was king, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel; and the LORD your God said to you, You shall

shepherd My people Israel, and you shall be prince over My people Israel. So all the elders of Israel came to the king at Hebron, and David made a covenant with them in Hebron before the LORD; and they anointed David king over Israel, according to the word of the LORD through Samuel” (1 Chron. 11:1-3). Hebron means fellowship, a league, and these men all gathered themselves together in one purpose, with one object, as one man to make David king. On what ground? “We are your bone and your flesh.” That is organic union, not organised unity! That is something inward, something in the very constitution of things, so that David’s kingship was, in the first place, based upon *an inward oneness*.

“When Saul was king, *you* were the one who led out and brought in Israel ...”. David’s kingship, then, in the second place, was based on his *practical values as leader*.

I challenge you, in the presence of the Lord Jesus, Is He worthy, by His leadership, to be King? We can answer the first question, “we are your bone”. It is an inward organic oneness. Then as to His worthiness, He has proved Himself. Yes, Saul was king, but did not prove himself worthy of kingship. “Even when Saul was king, you were the one who led out and brought in Israel.” There we see the supremacy of Christ in virtue of His own ability. The Lord said, “You shall be prince ...”.

Then thirdly, *the foundation of the throne is the divine designation*. The Lord had spoken by Samuel, and the people fell in with the divine decree, and anointed David king.

Hebron was that. Hebron was inward union, the right of kingship by reason of his own value, and the right of kingship by reason of the divine appointment. When you recognise those things, and come to them you know what fellowship is. It was, therefore at Hebron, in fellowship, on that threefold ground, that David came to Jerusalem. They made him king in fellowship, and then he went up to Jerusalem for the outworking of that.

That is only an illustration, a type, but it is true in its spiritual principle that the Lord Jesus in His sovereignty is deeply and directly affected by the fellowship of His people, by the oneness, and there is much taken from Him if that oneness, that fellowship, does not obtain, does not abound.

2. Fellowship involves the meaning of Christ’s cross

Fellowship involves the meaning of Christ’s cross in a measure and in a way more than most matters. That is not a new thought perhaps, that the cross of the Lord Jesus was not only a dealing with sin as sin, and with Satan as Satan, not only an atonement for sin, but the undoing of all the work of Satan

through sin. One of the works of Satan through sin was the disintegration of the creation, the causing of a discord to be shot clean through the creation, so that in its fallen state it is, as it were, in fragments. There is no harmony. There is no oneness. There is a warring element — strained relationships, conflict, rivalry, and all those things which set fragments against fragments, and lead to this state of eternal unrest. It is in the very constitution of things. You will never destroy that by the councils of men. With all that may be got in postponements and getting round difficult corners, and so on, our leagues and our round tables will never solve that eternal element in the very constitution of the creation. There will be wars unto the end, and they will become worse and worse. It is in the nature of things, not only in man but in the whole universe. The unity of the race was destroyed by Satan through man’s sin. Now the cross of the Lord Jesus is the destroying of the works of the devil, and that is why in John 17, as standing right before the cross, in the presence of the altar upon which, He says, “I consecrate Myself”, right there as now entering into the shadows of the cross, He prays this prayer: “That they may be one”. It is all unto that. The cross is going to effect that, and the cross is God’s way in Christ of ending that work of the devil in the severance, the division, the schism, the strain, the warfare, the conflict, in the very nature of things.

In the resurrection of the Lord Jesus in which we are together in Him, there is to be, there should be, the testimony to the fact that that work of the devil has been destroyed, nullified, and here is a people who are one. So you find that when, after His resurrection, the Spirit eventually came, they continued *in fellowship* among other things, and it was that fellowship which became the object of God, the activity of the enemy, because it was the testimony to the destruction of his work in the cross of the Lord Jesus. We know quite well that when divisions come, and strains in relationships, the only way of getting over it is to have a further application of the cross somewhere to the old creation. Personal rights, personal sensibilities, jealousies and rivalries have to come under the smiting power of the cross again before there can be a coming back to that complete fellowship. The great work of the cross of the Lord Jesus is touched in a way more than most things by fellowship.

3. Fellowship demands and reveals a life in the Spirit

As we have seen, it is not in us at our best to triumph with divine love. At its best our human love will be strained to breaking-point when brought up against certain situations. Nothing but the mighty love of God, energised by

the Holy Spirit in us, will really triumph, and that means a life in the Spirit. If you and I in any way live in the flesh there will be schism, there will be division, there will be a decrease in fellowship. Somewhere, somehow, someone or other has got out of the Spirit, and it is only as you and I live in the Spirit and are energised by the Spirit that this fellowship will be maintained, with the maintenance of the sovereignty of the Lord Jesus, unsullied. The work of His cross is the glorious testimony of His accomplishment by His death. This life in the Spirit is demanded, and is revealed as to its measure and degree, by fellowship. A life in the Spirit will lead to fellowship: a life not in the Spirit will lead away from fellowship.

4. Fellowship determines the measure and value of the fulness of life and effectiveness of service

Fulness of life is determined by fellowship. This again is no new truth, but it needs constantly re-emphasising, that individuals as such can never come to the fulness of Christ. Neither you nor I will ever come to Christ's fulness as individuals. It requires the *whole* Church, the *whole* Body of Christ to come to His fulness. It is the church which is the fulness of Him that fills all in all. You and I will only come to the fulness of Christ in relation to all other members of His Body. If we isolate ourselves we simply limit our spiritual growth; we at once put a limitation on our spiritual development. We shall grow and increase more abundantly as we are in fellowship. Our mutual faith, our mutual love, our mutual helpfulness means the increase of all. Sometimes you may think you would get on much better, and make much more rapid growth, if only you could get away by yourself. Believe me, you would limit yourself, and it would not be long before you wanted to get back among the Lord's people. Some of us have tried it, and the enemy is so often trying to get us to run away, get out and alone, not just for a time (sometimes it is good to have a day or two alone with the Lord) but to get right away altogether, finally away. Ask anybody who has tried it, and they will tell you that their spiritual increase has been far greater in fellowship with others, though that fellowship may sometimes have cost and been a strenuous thing, and called for some of the greatest conflicts and victories. Nevertheless it is thus that we make increase. Read the chapters in the Epistles on that matter in Ephesians and Corinthians, and you will see that the law is there stressed tremendously, that it is each one contributing to the building up by relationship.

Effectiveness of service is governed by the same law. We shall not accomplish the fullest and most effective service for God on an independent line. Anything like that only goes so far and no further. It goes no further in

its spiritual fulness, neither does it go any further in its real effectiveness. It just goes so far, and it cannot go one wit beyond that. But when truth of the Body of Christ comes in, then there is increase. The Lord is in that and it goes through. Fellowship is not just a matter of getting people to pray for you when you are going out to service, any more than it is to get people to give money to support you. Fellowship is a much bigger thing than that. There are more tremendous implications in fellowship than that. It is an organic thing, not an organised thing. It is an inward thing, a mighty thing in its values. The losses are tremendous where it does not obtain, and where it is not recognised.

Costs associated with fellowship

There has to be a sinking of what is personal and merely individual. There has to be a subjecting of ourselves to one another in the Lord, but the gain is along that line, and it is always a dangerous thing to go out into the service of the Lord, to meet the enemy in Christian life, if you are not in living organic fellowship with the Lord's people, not that they just assure you they will pray for you, but that by inward, real fellowship there is a oneness. If the enemy can get you isolated he will break you.

This is one further emphasis from the Lord's own heart, that we should seek with all our hearts to work towards fellowship, repudiate isolation, independence and anything that works in that way. If we have to fight our own inclinations, our own feelings, let us stand strongly for the positive aspect of fellowship, and seek to be *in* with the Lord, and anything that possibly can be put aside to realise this is going to be for the increase of all, and for the far greater effectiveness of the work of the Lord.

May the Lord help you to take this on your heart, as having the importance which it does have in His heart.

PAUL'S GROUND OF APPEAL TO FELLOWSHIP

Reading: Phil. 2:1.

In our former meditation we sought to bring into view some of the great magnitudes which are bound up with the question of fellowship among the Lord's people. If we quietly sat back with this matter, and allowed our minds to open and move in this connection, we should more and more be impressed with the *tremendous* importance, the *great* place, and with how much is bound up with spiritual fellowship. It would seem that in a very real way most of our problems are focused here, and that in touching this matter we are touching a whole host of other things. I feel that when once we come to the place where, with a sufficient recognition of the importance and the necessity for definitely fighting the battle of fellowship and making it an object of serious practical concern, a very large number of our problems, difficulties and other spiritual interests will be touched.

That is something stated, the content and import of which perhaps does not for the moment impress you, but if you will meditate upon it no doubt you will be impressed by the fact that fellowship has been a battleground all the way through the ages. There has been a tremendous conflict on the ground of fellowship, spiritual fellowship among the Lord's people.

If you look at the letters of Paul alone you will find sufficient to impress you with that fact. Almost every one of his letters is occupied at some point or other with this matter as something which has to be striven after, fought for, laid to heart, regarded with the utmost seriousness. And if this is nothing else than something which comes into the realm of real spiritual conflict or warfare, surely that is indicative of its importance and as to what the enemy's estimate of fellowship is as among the Lord's people. It would clearly indicate that this is a matter over which the enemy is prepared to spend himself untiringly and unceasingly, and we should never come down to the low level of regarding this matter as simply that of getting on amicably together as so many people. It represents something infinitely greater than that.

Even among the Philippians, over whom the apostle rejoiced so greatly, concerning whom he says such gracious and such heartfelt things of praise and appreciation, even there this question arises. It seems that no company of the Lord's people is too sacred to be invaded by spirits of division, and so we have this matchless fragment of inspired language in the second chapter of the Philippian letter. Note how it begins, the ground of the apostle's appeal to the Philippians on the matter of fellowship:

"If there is therefore any comfort in Christ ..."

You notice that this repeated "if" is an effort on the part of the apostle to find a response. He is using these various stimuli by which to evoke a response. It is like a master physician dealing with a case which has gone so far that all kinds of expedients need to be used to find some kind of response. This is tried, and that is tried, and something else is tried. And so the apostle repeatedly uses this word "if".

Will they respond? The first "if" brings in what our translation, not quite accurately, calls: "comfort in Christ". The real word there is "exhortation", "If there is therefore any exhortation in Christ". That is literally, if in Christ there is any appeal to your hearts, if your experience in Christ speaks to you at all, if you have such an experience in Christ that that experience makes an appeal to you! It is the difference between a merely formal professing Christian, whose relationship to Christ is such as to make no appeal to their heart at all, and one who has an experience of Christ, and who, because of that experience, finds that their very knowledge of Christ appeals to their heart. The apostle is putting it on that ground. He says, Now if your very experience, your very life in Christ, makes an appeal to you, exhorts you! He raises this matter to this level. If you have such a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus that I have only to present this thing to you and you say, Yes, my very knowledge of Christ requires that of me! Or, can you go on coldly and formally, as somebody who has no such inward personal experience of Christ? Does your relationship with the Lord become a living exhortation in your heart? If you are alive to the voice of Christ in your own heart — that is what it means.

"... if there is any consolation of love ..."

Here again the translation needs a little adjusting. If any encouragement — not consolation, although it is included. Another word would be, If any

persuasiveness of love; that is, if love has any power to stir you to listen to me. This is another stimulant. If love has any power to move you to listen to me. What a test! If they do not respond to that, well, what kind of believers are they? If we do not respond to that, what kind of believers are we? Has love power to move us?

“... if there is any fellowship of the Spirit ...”

That word “fellowship” can be translated, and perhaps even more accurately, as “partnership”. The Holy Spirit is presented in the Word as working towards an end. He is the Spirit of the unity of the Body. He is the Spirit Who brings out of disintegration a perfect whole, out of fragmentariness a completeness, out of chaos an order, out of division unity. The Holy Spirit is working to that end. He is here for that. The Spirit of the One Body, by Whom we are all baptised into that One Body, is working. Now the apostle says; “if there is any partnership in the Spirit”. We are fellow-workers with the Holy Spirit towards His end, and He says, Are you? If you are in partnership do this which I say! It is a tremendous appeal. Are you in partnership with the Holy Spirit? Are you in fellowship with the Holy Spirit in His object? Are you in partnership with the Holy Spirit in His efforts for the unifying and solidity of the Body?

“... if there are any tender mercies and compassions ...”

Here the apostle uses two words: “tender mercies” — he says the word which really means the seat or organ of compassion. When He uses the word ‘compassion’, He uses another word by which He means the pity itself. One is the organ of compassion, and the other is the compassion. What He is really saying is, “if you have a heart and if in your heart there is any compassion ...”. What a challenge! He is coming to this case, shall we say to this clinic, and is testing it. Has it got a heart, or is it heartless? Having a heart, what is in it? Is there any compassion in this heart? If you have a heart, and if in that heart there is any pity, make my joy complete, be of one mind.

Do you see all that hangs upon fellowship? Do you see all that is bound up with fellowship? If you know anything about the voice of the Lord in your heart, any exhortation; if you know any persuasiveness of love — or, if there is any persuasiveness in love — if there is any partnership with the Holy Spirit: if you have any heart and in your heart any compassion, then be of one mind. Do we rise to these stimulants? Do we respond? It determines at

once our spiritual condition. That is the ground of the appeal. It is very high ground. The apostle is not just saying, Now do try and get on alright together, you Christians! Do make up your differences! Do overlook one another’s imperfections! Do agree to differ on some things! No, He lifts things right away into the full content of what it means to be in Christ. That is the force here, and that is what it means to be in Christ.

Then he sets all that in a much wider and vaster background, the background of the mind of Christ. He says, “be of one mind”, but what mind? “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus ...” (Phil. 2:5). What a background that is! If you meditate upon all that follows that phrase concerning the mind of Christ, you will see how far-reaching and deep-reaching this whole matter of fellowship is. You will see that in all that the apostle says Christ has countered each element of the fall, and each element, therefore, of disruption. Look at it simply. “Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus, Who, being (existing, ASV) in the form of God, counted not the being on an equality with God a thing to be grasped ...”. In the light of the context, what does that imply? Being in God-form and being on equality with God meant *absolute fullness*. He was filled with all the fullness of God. What was His attitude towards it, in view of that which had happened to disappoint the Father, and to rob God of something? He would not hold that fullness in a Personal way, and so the Word says: “He emptied Himself.” Personal fullness! Was not that right at the very root of the fall, and is not that right at the very root of disruption? Fullness held in a personal way. So the apostle says that we are not to look on our own things. The Lord Jesus, Who was filled with all the fullness of God, did not grasp it in a personal way, to hold it, but emptied Himself in order to undo the mischief of the fall.

It is a principle of redemptive work, and therefore if the Church as His Body is the vessel of His Testimony, the Testimony of His great redemptive work, it is essential that the Church should represent this, no one seeking for fullness in a personal way, to have it in themselves. He emptied Himself.

He took the form of a servant. He took the form, as the margin says, of a bondservant. Surely that tells us that the mischief of the fall lay in the direction of a desire for personal superiority. In effect, whether Adam in his thoughts reasoned like this or not, the spiritual elements which were at work in him amounted to this, Why should I be a servant when I could be a lord? Why should I be the bond-slave of God when I could be equal with God? (The serpent had suggested that). Why should I serve when I could be a master? It was the revolt against being under orders, and when he thus rebelled it was the disruption of God’s world, the ruin of God’s purpose. But

He took the form of a bond-slave to undo it: He assumed therefore no personal superiority. The church must know nothing of that. Fellowship demands the utter ruling out of that. We are a company of servants, bond-slaves.

He was made in the likeness of men. What was Adam after? Was he revolting against being just a man? Was he reaching out to be God? The Word justifies our reading that into what the enemy was after. Immediately anyone desires a worth-ship, they put themselves in the place of God, and out of the place of man. What is worship? Appropriating the worth-ship, which, in principle, is getting into God's place. But He Who was God, while He never ceased to be other, yet took the form of man. Oh, wonderful! That God should condescend to man-form! I do not suppose any of us would say that we wanted to be God, or would aspire to be God, but in our very being, because of the fall, there is that which wants to take the worth-ship. We like to be made something of. We hate to be ignored. We hate to be set at naught. We hate to be accounted as refuse. We might say in our pious moments that we do not mind being treated as a doormat, but let people try it, and keep at it! Then there is something there which piously might hold out for a time, but it finds us out. There is something of pride in this being of ours which likes to be made something of, to be recognised. The chief battle in many lives is in that direction. He took man-form; for the time being, He who was God let go the worship.

Do you see what He got in the place of worship? A crown of thorns, a reed, a smiting, and a spitting! Strange worship for the God of the universe! That mind is the mind of fellowship. Only as you and I have that mind will this fellowship be possible.

Being found in fashion as a man He humbled Himself. We need not stay to see the desire for honour and exaltation that is in every human heart in some form or another. Very few men and women really like being humble. Is it not because of that that a very great deal of strain, and not a few of the divisions and disruptions among the people of God have come about, together with a lack of humility, humbleness of mind and heart? On the other hand, there is a desire for honour, exaltation and place. He humbled Himself, becoming obedient. It is just the opposite to giving orders, being in command.

Obedience unto death, yea the death of the cross. There is nothing more stripped of dignity than the cross. Dignity! Ah, that finds us out. The death of the cross so often works out that way in touching our dignity. We must die in the realm of our dignity so often.

We have only covered the ground in a superficial way, but you notice that the cumulative effect is the way to fellowship.

Fellowship is a tremendous thing in the purposes of God. That fellowship of the Spirit for which the apostle fought so long and faithfully, for which he made this great appeal, can only be realized in its many forms as this mind is in us which was in Christ Jesus. No self-fulness, no self-superiority, no self-mastery or leadership, no self-worthship, no self-exaltation and honour, no self-commanding, no self-dignity. It is the self element that is the evil one. Our dignity may be all very well sometimes for ourselves, but what about others. "Look not every man upon his own things, but every man also upon the things of others" (Phil. 2:4). It may be very good for us to begin to order about, but what about the people who are being ordered about? Someone has got to suffer when self comes in in any form. The sting of self is selfishness, which always hurts somebody.

These are strong words, but they are not too strong in view of the great thing which is before us. We just indicate one further point, but will not stay to dwell upon it. It relates to the positive side. God has always demanded the fellowship spirit in any vessel which He has used. You and I can say farewell to usefulness in the things of God — no, we shall not say farewell, we shall never have full usefulness in the things of God until we have learned the fellowship spirit. We may be leaders, but in our leadership we have got to have the fellowship spirit. There is no despotism. You can be a God-appointed leader and yet have fullest fellowship and work by the principle of corporation. That does not mean that we have all to be boiled down to a common level in the purpose. God appoints leaders, and He raises up instruments, but He does not make them superior; He always keeps them in the place of fellowship in order to be used. May He teach us more about it, and put it into our hearts to make it a business, not just trying to live a nice cheerful life together, but standing strongly in the Lord against every element that works against fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP BASED UPON THE RULING OUT OF THE PERSONAL ELEMENT

Reading: Acts 2:42; Phil. 2:1; 2 Cor. 13:14.

We read in the second chapter of the letter to the Philippians, with which the Holy Spirit brings us clearly into touch with such tremendous appeal, that fellowship — as the apostle puts it, “*being of one mind*” — is based upon the elimination and ruling out of personal elements in every direction. There is a sevenfold movement on the part of the Lord Jesus from equality with God to obedience unto death, yea the death of the cross, and in each of those steps there is some aspect of self-emptying, the emptying of some phase of what could be had and held in a personal way, until the end is reached where everything of a personal character has been laid aside. That is the background against which the apostle makes his tremendous appeal, “... be of the same mind ...”. So that clearly personal elements of every kind have to go, in order to have the fellowship of the Spirit.

If the Lord Jesus is the model to which God ever works, then we shall expect that in the case of every one of those who come into relationship with Him for His purposes there will be an application and a working out of that principle. It will be necessary for the servant to go the way of the Master, and although no servant will ever make so great a condescension, because no servant has ever occupied so high a place and possessed so great a fullness, nevertheless as men it will be necessary for everything of a personal character to be dealt with. So we are able to trace the working of that in the life of every one whom God has in any way laid hold of in relation to His purpose. For this present moment our object is to note it. If we are not able to exhaust the whole matter in each case, we will just note it in the case of those outstanding men, those men who have themselves become types of the great Antitype, types for us of God's ways with men when they are livingly related to His end.

Abraham

We begin with Abraham. The lessons of Abraham's life are numerous, but in the midst of all the other things which come for our instruction through him there is this one thing which is undoubtedly for our instruction, how God emptied Abraham of the personal element. It may have been largely a personal tendency or danger, it may have become an actuality, but God saw to it that that thing did not remain or develop, as the case may be. Everything for Abraham in relation to God was bound up with Isaac. We know that Isaac was impossible along any natural line, and therefore he was the gift of God, the result of a supernatural activity, and God bound up everything for Abraham's life and future with Isaac. Abraham's vision was in Isaac. Abraham's hope and destiny were bound up with Isaac. Then the Lord one day commanded Abraham to offer Isaac as a sacrifice, and in the following out of the divine command Isaac was brought to the place as good as dead. It only required the space of time necessary to bring the hand down in one swift flash, and Isaac would have been dead. In God's acceptance it was as good as done. In Abraham's heart it was as good as done. And so the apostle is quite right in saying that in a way he received him back from the dead.

What we see as part of the meaning of this is that God was taking even a divinely given thing out of the realm of man's personal holding. No doubt Abraham's heart had so gone out to Isaac that he was at least inclined to hold Isaac very dear to himself, to bind Isaac to himself. And the Lord would put Isaac beyond all the control, all the possessiveness of man on his natural side, in an earthly way, and put Isaac out into a realm where he was utterly and only of God, which is always the case when it is a matter of resurrection.

We can see quite clearly in this a lesson which is of very wide application, that it is possible for us to have something given us of God, a vision, a vocation, something which undoubtedly came from the Lord. It was not of our own producing, our own seeking; it never came by way of our effort; we could never have come to it of ourselves. It was of the Lord, a call, a ministry, a place, a vision, or something else, God-given without a doubt. Then the day comes when, by the Lord's own act, it is taken away, brought to the altar, and no longer *seems* to be of God. It looks as though He Himself contradicts Himself in our lives, and we come to the place where we have to let it go. We know that we are challenged by God; this is no incident, not mere chance, not just the outworking of natural conditions. God has met us, and although not in the same words but in our hearts quite

as definitely, we know God has said: Take now your vision, your vocation, your call, your sphere, whatever it is, and hand it all over, let it go, give it back! Very often that is because the Lord is wanting to put it in a realm where the personal hold upon it ceases. The thing can only be limited if we have any personal possessiveness or interest in the Lord's work or in the things of the Lord. To have it in the realm of the limitless, the eternal, the place where death cannot touch it, where no power of earth can interfere with it, it has to become altogether severed from our natural, personal control, hold or government. It has to get out into the realm where only God possesses and holds and governs.

That is a very important thing for every child of God, and especially for every servant of God, to recognise. It is something which runs as a governing truth throughout everything in relation to the Lord. The Lord, sooner or later, with all those who are going all the way with Him, requires that even things which have come from Him, His own precious gifts, are let go by us personally, to be had only in the Lord. And if we count it something to be grasped at, that is, to have it for ourselves personally, we lose something, we limit it, we rob God of something, and we rob ourselves of something. It is what we have in God which partakes of the universal, the spiritual, the heavenly, the eternal elements of God, and goes through to God's full end. So that even that which may be our Isaac, given of God, has to be removed from the realm where we have hold of it, where we are manipulating, where the personal element touches it. It has to go outside of that realm to where it is of God, and only of God, if it is going to reach God's end.

So the Lord put Isaac into a realm where even Abraham could not hold him. It might be quite a natural thing, with nothing evil about it, nothing sinful, nothing wrong from one standpoint, but when you bring in God's great interests then there has to be the outworking of an utterness of death to self, to what is personal, which might not be necessary in other, lesser realms.

Jacob

We pass from Abraham to Jacob. There the thing is so obvious that we hardly need to stay with it. If ever a man was governed by the personal interest and element it was Jacob. From the first you see him scheming for himself in connection with the birthright. It was personal possessiveness, personal advantage, personal position. With Laban all his trickery was to

gain personal ends, personal advantages. And then when he left Laban, on the way he was still thinking in the realm of personal gain. God met him at Jabbok and that night God touched the symbol of his strength, the sinew of his thigh, and withered it, and from that night onwards Jacob never walked without a staff. When he came to the end of his life and blessed his sons he did so leaning upon the top of his staff. Right to the end of his life there was the symbol of his own weakness and his dependence upon something outside of himself. God touched the self-strength of Jacob, so that it might be placed on record: "I am the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob." God is never the God of the man of self-strength, self-sufficiency, self-advantage, and self-strength. He is the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who emptied Himself.

Joseph

From Jacob you go to Joseph, one of the most sublime types of Christ, and you remember how Joseph comes into the picture. He had a dream, one little dream. There are the sheaves all bowing down to *his* sheaf. Yes, the very heavenly bodies are bowing down to him. Everything is bowing to young Joseph. Well, he is a young man, and young men are allowed to have dreams, and young men's dreams somehow are coloured with themselves being in the place of advantage, in some great position. And as a youth Joseph told his dreams to his brethren. It was altogether unwise to go and tell all his brethren., You all bowed down to me! Of course it put their backs up! But there was more in the dream than merely a dream. There was divine intention, divine purpose. Those dreams were coming true in a very wonderful way. They did come true, and the brethren did eventually bow down and make obeisance to him. But look at all the things that happened between the dream and its fulfilment. He was dropped into a pit, he was taken out and sold for thirty pieces of silver, he was driven off into a foreign country, he was flung into the dungeon and the iron entered into his bones and the Word of the Lord tried him. He was emptied of the self element, and when eventually the brethren did bow down to him there was no gloating over it, no saying, 'Ah, I knew it was coming to this, they are in my power now, they did not believe me then, but here it is!' No! He could not refrain himself from weeping. Here is a man who is the big man, and the big man is always the man who is emptied of self. God saw to that.

God never brings a man to His divine end until he has been emptied of the personal element.

Moses

From Joseph we pass to Moses. Note how Moses comes into the picture. We are told that Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians. He was brought up in Pharaoh's house. He was a great man, we are told, after this world, and in some way he came to know that God had a special purpose in his life, that it was he who was to redeem His people. And then, in the greatness of this world, its position, its advantages, he came forward to put his divine vocation into operation. We know what he did, and we know the result. Seeking in self-strength, self-sufficiency to do God's work, disaster overtook him. The immediate issue was the wilderness, and the wilderness for forty years. At the end of the forty years the commission, direct, definite, conclusive! But how? God illustrated for Moses once and for all how a man fulfils a heavenly vocation in the bush that did not burn, a common bush of the desert, nothing in itself, no pride of its own, and yet in that which in itself is nothing there is a power which is of God, and the common bush, which in ordinary circumstances would perish and die and be destroyed, goes on and on in the power of an enduring life, because God is in it. We have this treasure in vessels of fragile clay that the exceeding greatness of the power may be of *God and not of ourselves*. That is the principle. The bush was Moses, and the power, the fire, was God. That was why Moses went through. On that basis the commission comes. Moses is self emptied; "I cannot speak"! A different Moses from forty years earlier. The personal side of things has been well dealt with, and now God says: "I am"! and, in effect, "I can"!

David

We pass from Moses to David. We have not much to say of the emptying of David, but the emptiness of David is one of the beautiful things in his life. There were his brethren, and Samuel was somewhat impressed with the important bearing and appearance of the brethren of David, and when he looked upon the fine stature of Eliab, David's elder brother, he said: "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him", and the Lord said: "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees ... the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7). Then the brethren had to pass by, and there was no indication from the Lord to anoint any one of them. Then you know that the one who was reckoned as an outsider so far as this world's considerations were concerned was brought in, and the Lord said; "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." You notice

through David's life there is that beautiful selflessness. When he came to the preparation for the building of the temple, and men of power and influence, even kings, were sending him material for the temple, David said: "Who am I, O Lord God, and what is my house..." (2 Sam 7:18). The Lord said to David: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep, to be ruler over My people Israel" (2 Sam. 7:8) The Lord reminded him of his humble origin, and because of this absence of the personal element in David's life the Lord was able to say that he was a man after His own heart, who would do all His pleasure.

Paul

We take a swift movement from David to Paul, and see the outworking of the thing in a man who to begin with was full of self, self-strength, self-purpose, self-importance, self-sufficiency, self-assertiveness. He was apprehended of Christ and poured out in the dust, until he would say: "We have this treasure in earthen vessels", "when I am weak then am I strong", "I glory in infirmities ... that the power of Christ may rest upon me."

To gather up all that Paul said which indicated the absence of self would take a long time. He was a man mightily emptied out, and therefore mightily filled of God.

We have left out many, such as Isaiah, Jeremiah, and others, but we have said enough to see that it is the putting away of the self, or the personal element, which becomes basic to God's great purpose, and comes very closely in relation to the matter of fellowship. We know so well that the things which destroy fellowship, or make fellowship impossible, or at best limit fellowship, are always personal elements. If it is me and mine, if there is some secret hidden concern for our own place, our own work, anything that is our own, it will get in the way of the Holy Spirit, it will weaken relationships, it will limit the fulness of Christ.

This is all a very strong appeal to us to be constantly before the Lord, in order that He may have the fullest possible end in us, that if there is a personal element in us it shall be disclosed, it shall not work in secret, but the Lord will bring it out and that we shall have grace to bring that to the place where the slaying is. He emptied Himself. The Lord give us grace in His presence to be emptied, so that we may be filled.

"Therefore if there is ... any fellowship of the Spirit ... make my joy complete ... being of the same mind, maintaining the same love ..."