

Fellowship as a Covenant

Shared Life, Devotion, Joy

Fellowship is Commitment, Not Convenience

They were devoting themselves to the apostles' teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Reverential awe came over everyone, and many wonders and miraculous signs came about by the apostles. All who believed were together and held everything in common, and they began selling their property and possessions and distributing the proceeds to everyone, as anyone had need. Every day they continued to gather together by common consent in the temple courts, breaking bread from house to house, sharing their food with glad and humble hearts, praising God and having the good will of all the people. And the Lord was adding to their number every day those who were being saved.
(Acts 2:42-47)

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<https://tinyurl.com/Call2Unity>

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Text: Acts 2:42–47

Objective: Fellowship is commitment, not convenience.

Key Themes: Shared life, devotion, joy.

Discussion:

How did the early church live out unity?

How can we reclaim covenant fellowship today?

Application: Commit to intentional community rhythms.

The King's Perspective

Our Mission... (Matt. 22:37-40; 28:19-20)

1. *Love the Lord with all your heart* (Worship – Matt. 4:10).
2. *Love your neighbor as yourself* (Service - Eph. 4:12)
3. *Go and make disciples* (Evangelism – Acts 1:8).
4. *Baptize them* (Fellowship; Covenant Unity – Eph. 4:1-6)
5. *Teach them to obey* (Discipleship – Col. 1:28)

"I give you a new commandment – to love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another."

John 13:34

Foundational Pillars of Fellowship (from Acts 2)

Devotion – Persistent commitment to spiritual practices (v. 42)

Presence – Sharing meals, time, and space (v. 46)

Generosity – Meeting needs with glad and sincere hearts (v. 45)

Unity – Having "all things in common" (v. 44)

Worship and Praise – A rhythm of collective joy and awe (v. 47)

This is not loose association, but a **covenant community**—sustained by shared values and spiritual bonds.

Fellowship is a sacred, Spirit-born **commitment** to shared life—not a matter of convenience or occasional attendance. The early church practiced this through rhythms of worship, hospitality, generosity, and mutual encouragement.

How does our fellowship today compare to the model in Acts 2?

In what ways does convenience threaten covenant commitment in the modern church?

Which of the seven Ephesians themes do you think your church needs most?

How can your small group or congregation pursue "intentional rhythms" of fellowship?

Broken Fellowship Covenants

Covenant vs. Convenience

Cain and Abel (Genesis 4:1–9)

Violation: Jealousy and unrepentance lead to murder.

Fellowship Breakdown: Instead of protecting his brother, Cain becomes his brother's destroyer.

Lesson: Anger and envy, left unchecked, dissolve trust and desecrate the image of family and covenant.

"Am I my brother's keeper?" – Cain (Genesis 4:9)

| <u>Faithful Fellowship</u> | <u>Broken Fellowship</u> |
|-------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Devotion to teaching & prayer | Disregard for spiritual leadership |
| Mutual generosity & care | Greed, deception, or jealousy |
| Humility & submission | Pride, control, or self-centeredness |
| Christ-centered unity | Factionalism and party spirit |
| Joyful praise and awe | Complaint, rebellion, idolatry |

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2. Korah's Rebellion (Numbers 16)

Violation: Pride and power-grabbing among the Levites challenged God's appointed leadership (Moses and Aaron).

Fellowship Breakdown: The rebellion fractured the community and brought judgment.

Lesson: Disregarding God-ordained structure and promoting factionalism invites division and divine discipline.

3. The Golden Calf (Exodus 32)

Violation: The people quickly turned to idol worship in Moses' absence.

Fellowship Breakdown: They broke covenant with God and each other.

Lesson: Idolatry corrupts both vertical and horizontal relationships; fellowship rooted in convenience turns into chaos.

"They have been quick to turn away from what I commanded them..." – Exodus 32:8

4. Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1–11)

Violation: They lied to the apostles and the Holy Spirit about their offering.

Fellowship Breakdown: They undermined the trust and sincerity that defined early Christian community.

Lesson: Hypocrisy and deceit poison spiritual unity and violate the integrity of covenant life.

5. Demas (2 Timothy 4:10)

Violation: Forsook Paul out of love for the world.

Fellowship Breakdown: Deserted gospel partnership for worldly comfort or safety.

Lesson: Personal self-interest and love of the world can break gospel fellowship.

"Demas, because he loved this world, has deserted me..." – 2 Timothy 4:10

6. Diotrephes (3 John 9–10)

Violation: Put himself first, rejected apostolic authority, and slandered fellow believers.

Fellowship Breakdown: Refused hospitality to others and cast out those who disagreed.

Lesson: Spiritual pride and control destroy the mutual submission that defines godly community.

Crisis in the Church (Mid-3rd Century)

A Schism on what to do with the Lapsed?

| Cyprian's Model | Modern Application |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| Balance between truth and mercy | Churches can restore fallen members without compromising doctrine |
| Unity is essential, even amid tension | Avoid schism through dialogue, consensus, and mutual humility |
| Discipline must aim at restoration | Church correction is not punitive but redemptive |
| Spiritual authority should be trusted | God uses shepherds to protect and restore the flock |

In 251 AD, Cyprian convened a **council of African bishops**.

Three-Tiered Approach to the Lapsed

Immediate restoration for those who had resisted or suffered torture.

Conditional restoration for the lapsed after a period of penance.

Permanent exclusion for those unrepentant or defiant.

Emphasis on Unity

Cyprian taught that a schism was as serious a sin as heresy: *"He can no longer have God for his Father who has not the Church for his mother."*

Historical Context

Around **250 AD**, under **Emperor Decius**, a major empire-wide **persecution of Christians** broke out.

Christians were required to offer public sacrifices to Roman gods and receive a certificate (**libellus**) proving compliance.

Many believers **lapsed** (Latin: *lapsi*)—denying Christ under pressure to save their lives or protect their families.

The Schism: How the Division Arose

The Key Issue: What to Do With the Lapsed?

After the persecution ended, some believers wanted to **return to the Church**.

This triggered a major debate over **church purity** vs. **mercy and reconciliation**.

Two Responses Emerged:

1. Novatian (in Rome)

A respected presbyter and theologian.

Argued that **the lapsed could not be forgiven** by the Church—only God could do so at final judgment.

His view: The Church must be a community of the pure; forgiveness was impossible for post-baptismal apostasy.

2. Cyprian (Bishop of Carthage)

Took a **pastoral and restorative approach**, rooted in unity and church authority.

Recognized that some lapsed had sinned gravely, but believed the Church had **power to forgive** under Christ's authority (John 20:23).

Advocated for **gradual restoration** of the lapsed through repentance, confession, and spiritual discipline.

Synod and Consensus

In 251 AD, Cyprian convened a **council of African bishops**.

1. Three-Tiered Approach to the Lapsed

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2. Emphasis on Unity

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The Cane Ridge Revival (August 1801)

From Division to Covenant Fellowship

| Challenge | Restorative Practice |
|-------------------------|--|
| Doctrinal Division | Focus on core gospel truths and apostolic simplicity |
| Sectarian Identity | Declare themselves “Christians only, not the <i>only</i> Christians” |
| Leadership Conflicts | Emphasize shared authority through elders |
| Tradition vs. Scripture | Hold the Bible as the only rule of faith and practice |

How They Overcame Division

Public confession that “**we are not the only Christians**”

Focus on shared essentials rather than divisive specifics

Commitment to **Scripture over tradition**

Emphasis on **shared Lordship of Christ**, baptism, and table fellowship

Background Context
Location: Cane Ridge, near Paris, Kentucky
Date: August 1801
Key Figures: Barton W. Stone (Presbyterian minister), others from Methodist and Baptist backgrounds
Setting: Frontier America during the Second Great Awakening

Event Description
A massive **camp meeting revival**—perhaps the largest in early U.S. history.
Estimates of **10,000 to 25,000 people** attended (staggering for the time).
Featured intense emotional responses: weeping, shouting, falling, physical trembling—interpreted by many as conviction and spiritual awakening.
Preachers from different denominations **set aside doctrinal divisions** to preach repentance and the gospel of Christ.

Spiritual and Social Impact
Broke barriers between Presbyterians, Methodists, and Baptists.
Highlighted hunger for **authentic spiritual experience** and **non-sectarian unity**.
Raised new questions about ecclesiastical authority and denominational identity.

Key Leaders
Barton W. Stone (from Kentucky revival tradition)
Thomas Campbell and **Alexander Campbell** (immigrants from Scotland with Reformed/Presbyterian backgrounds)

Core Convictions
Christian Unity: Division among Christians is sinful and contrary to Christ’s prayer in John 17.
No Creed but Christ: Rejected man-made creeds; affirmed the Bible alone as sufficient for faith and practice.
Restoration of New Testament Christianity: A return to the simplicity and purity of the early Church.
Congregational Autonomy: Independent local churches governed by elders, without centralized authority.
Believer’s Baptism: Emphasis on immersion for remission of sins.
Weekly Lord’s Supper: Practiced as part of the apostolic tradition.

Milestone:
In **1832**, Stone’s followers and the Campbellites formally united in Lexington, Kentucky—symbolizing a covenantal act of **Christian reconciliation and unity**.

From Division to Covenant Fellowship
Challenges Faced
Denominational mistrust
Differing views on sacraments, leadership, and church polity
Personality tensions (e.g., some questioned Alexander Campbell’s strong leadership)

How They Overcame Division
Public confession that “**we are not the only Christians**”
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Emphasis on **shared Lordship of Christ**, baptism, and table fellowship

Legacy and Lasting Influence
Positive Outcomes
Gave rise to what became:
 Churches of Christ
 Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)
 Independent Christian Churches
Promoted **unity in essentials**, liberty in non-essentials, and charity in all things.
Inspired future ecumenical efforts and movements focused on **biblical simplicity** and **local church autonomy**.

Cautions and Weaknesses
Some later Restorationist groups developed rigid patterns of uniformity
Over time, the unity vision fractured due to disagreements over methods, instruments, and institutional cooperation

“Follow Me...” – Christianity is...

A Covenant Relationship with the Father, Son, Spirit

UNLESS YOU...

“Unless you repent you will perish...” Luke 13:3,5

“Unless you love Me more than your father, mother, son or daughter you are not worthy of Me...” Mathew 10:37

“Unless you lose your life for My sake you will never see life...” Matthew 16:25

“Unless you take up your cross and follow after Me you are not worthy of Me...” Matthew 10:38

Christianity - Not a “Works Religion”, rather a “Total Commitment Religion”

What did Jesus say? “Follow Me” not “Study Me”

EXHIBIT A BELIEVING FAITH

For this is the way God loved the world: He gave his one and only Son, so that everyone who believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life. John 3:16 (NET)

And truly Jesus did many other signs in the presence of His disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in His name. John 20:30-31 (NKJV)

REPENT OF YOUR SINS

But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! Luke 13:3 (NET)

But the things God foretold long ago through all the prophets – that His Christ would suffer – He has fulfilled in this way. Therefore repent and turn back so that your sins may be wiped out, so that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord, and so that He may send the Messiah appointed for you – that is, Jesus. Acts 3:18-20 (NET)

BE BAPTIZED

He said to them, “Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.” Mark 16:16 (NET)

Peter said to them, “Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is for you and your children, and for all who are far away, as many as the Lord our God will call to Himself.” Acts 2:38-39 (NET)

ENDURE TO THE END

But the person who endures to the end will be saved. And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached throughout the whole inhabited earth as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come. Matthew 24:13 (NET)

And to the one who conquers and continues in my deeds until the end, I will give him authority over the nations... Revelation 2:26 (NET)

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The Covenant is a gift from God

For by grace are you saved through faith (not of yourselves)

Even though we must believe and have faith in Jesus, **it's not our believing faith that saves**. *It's only by the shed **blood** of the Lamb of God, Jesus of Nazareth, that our sins will be forgiven.* **And yet, without faith no man will be saved.** (Ephesians 2:8-9)

Even though we must repent, that is turn from our sins, **it's not our repentance that saves us**. *It's only by the **blood** of God's only Son, shed at Golgotha, that our sins can be forgiven.* **And yet, if we do not repent, we will perish.** (Luke 13:3-5)

Even though we are commanded to be baptized, **it's not our baptism that saves us**. *It's only by the **blood** of the Messiah, who has defeated sin and death.* **And yet, without baptism no one will enter a Covenant Relationship with God.** (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 1 Peter 3:21; Romans 6:1-14)

- Why is there such debate about "exactly when is a person saved"?
- What is the "Biblical Plan of Salvation" and the importance that baptism plays in it?
- Did anyone in Apostolic Days ever admonish another to be "saved" by "saying a Sinner's Prayer"?
- What is the specific reason and purpose of baptism?
- What is the significance of being baptized in the Name of Yeshua of Nazareth?
- What are certain objections to the necessity of baptism?
- Why is it that we are commanded to obey a "water" baptism and not a "spirit" baptism?

Eph 2:8-9 For by grace you are saved through faith, and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God; (9) it is not from works, so that no one can boast.

Luk 13:3-5 No, I tell you! But unless you repent, you will all perish as well! (4) Or those eighteen who were killed when the tower in Siloam fell on them, do you think they were worse offenders than all the others who live in Jerusalem? (5) No, I tell you! But unless you repent you will all perish as well!"

Mar 16:16 The one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned.

Act 2:38 Peter said to them, "Repent, and each one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins, and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.

1Pe 3:21 And this prefigured baptism, which now saves you – not the washing off of physical dirt but the pledge of a good conscience to God – through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,

The Gospel centers on the restoration of relationship with God, accomplished through Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

- **John 17:3** : "Now this is eternal life: that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent."
- Defines eternal life as **knowing God personally and relationally**.

- **John 14:16-17** : "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another advocate to help you and be with you forever—the Spirit of truth. The world cannot accept him, because it neither sees him nor knows him. But you know him, for he lives with you and will be in you."
- **Speaks of the Holy Spirit's indwelling presence, a vital part of the believer's union with God.**

- **2 Corinthians 5:17-18** : "Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ."
- **Highlights the transformative power of the Gospel, reconciling believers to God.**

"If anyone says 'I love God' and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from Him is this: that the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian too. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the child fathered by Him. By this we know that we love the children of God: whenever we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments. And His commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God overcomes the world." 1 John 4:20 – 5:4

The Spiritual Man – A New Creation

1 Cor. 2:6-16; 2 Cor. 5:16-21; Galatians 5; Romans 8

Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new. (2 Cor. 5:17)

How to be Right with God...

"If anyone says 'I love God' and yet hates his fellow Christian, he is a liar because the one who does not love his fellow Christian whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen. And the commandment we have from Him is this: that the one who loves God should love his fellow Christian too. Everyone who believes that Jesus is the Christ has been fathered by God, and everyone who loves the Father loves the child fathered by Him. By this we know that we love the children of God: whenever we love God and obey His commandments. For this is the love of God: that we keep His commandments. And His commandments do not weigh us down, because everyone who has been fathered by God overcomes the world."

1 John 4:20 – 5:4

When Paul lists the "fruit of the Spirit" (Gal. 5:22–23)—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—he's describing the character and conduct that flow out of a life yielded to God's Spirit. Although the explicit phrase "Holy Spirit" appears less frequently in the Old Testament, several psalms not only point to "living the good life" (i.e., walking in covenant faithfulness and blessing) but also reference or imply the work of God's Spirit in shaping that life.

In **Jeremiah 31:31–34**, God promises a "new covenant" in which **His law will be written on people's hearts**, and as a result, **"they shall all know me."** This new covenant relationship implies an intimate, personal knowledge of God rather than a merely external or secondhand acquaintance. To understand how one can know they truly "know the LORD," it's helpful to consider several biblical principles that clarify the nature and evidence of this relationship.

1. An Internal, Heart-Level Knowledge:

Under the new covenant, God's law is not just a set of external rules; it is internalized. This indicates that truly knowing the LORD involves a changed heart—a shift from merely following religious observances to experiencing a genuine inward transformation (**Jeremiah 31:33**). Thus, one sign of knowing the Lord is the deep, inner desire to love, honor, and please Him, not because of external pressure, but because one's heart has been made new.

2. A Personal Relationship Through Christ:

The New Testament reveals that Jesus Christ mediates this new covenant. Through faith in Christ's death and resurrection, believers enter into a restored relationship with God (Hebrews 8:6–12, John 14:6). Knowing the Lord, then, is inseparable from knowing Christ. If you have placed your trust in Jesus, believing His sacrifice for your sins, and have become His disciple, this faith relationship is a foundational indicator that you know God.

3. Obedience as a Sign of Knowledge:

First John gives practical tests for knowing God:

1 John 2:3–6: Now by this we know that we know Him, if we keep His commandments. He who says, "I know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him. He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked.

4. Love as the Outflow of Knowing God:

Another test of knowing the Lord is found in love.

1 John 4:7–12: Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him. In this is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. No one has seen God at any time. If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us.

5. The Witness of the Holy Spirit:

Under the new covenant, God's Spirit dwells within believers:

Romans 8:12–17: Therefore, brethren, we are debtors—not to the flesh, to live according to the flesh. For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, these are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of bondage again to fear, but you received the Spirit of adoption by whom we cry out, "Abba, Father." The Spirit Himself bears witness with our spirit that we are children of God, and if children, then heirs—heirs of God and joint heirs with Christ, if indeed we suffer with Him, that we may also be glorified together.