

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

A mission from our King... (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)

"We proclaim Him by instructing and teaching all people with all wisdom so that we may present every person mature in Christ."

Colossians 1:28

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)

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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

How now shall we Live?

(1)

The Recipe

Live in Unity (Ephesians 4:1–6)

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.”

One body, one Spirit, one hope—fellowship is about **oneness** in calling and identity.

Point: Covenant fellowship honors the calling of each believer without competition.

Live in Holiness (4:17–32)

Put off the “old self,” live differently from the world. Speak truth, resolve anger quickly, build up others.

Point: Holiness protects fellowship—sin and unrepentance fracture community.

Live in Love (5:1–7)

“Walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us...”

Imitate God’s sacrificial love. Avoid impurity and greed.

Point: Love is the ethic of covenant commitment, not personal gain.

Live in the Light (5:8–14)

Expose darkness, bear fruit in truth and goodness.

Point: Transparent relationships are key to covenant fellowship.

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5. Live Wisely (5:15–21)

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...”

Be filled with the Spirit, submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

Teaching Point: Wisdom and Spirit-dependence protect fellowship from folly.

6. Cherish One Another (5:22–6:9)

Husbands, wives, children, masters, and servants—all relationships are marked by **mutual love and honor**.

Teaching Point: Covenant fellowship must extend to family and work life.

7. Put on the Full Armor of God (6:10–20)

Recognize the spiritual battle; protect the fellowship through prayer, truth, righteousness, and readiness.

Teaching Point: Unity will always face opposition. We fight for fellowship with spiritual weapons.

How now shall we Live?

(2)

The Recipe

Live Wisely (5:15–21)

“Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise...”

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Point: Wisdom and Spirit-dependence protect fellowship from folly.

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

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- **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.**