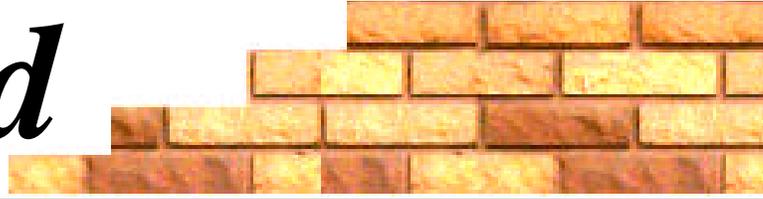


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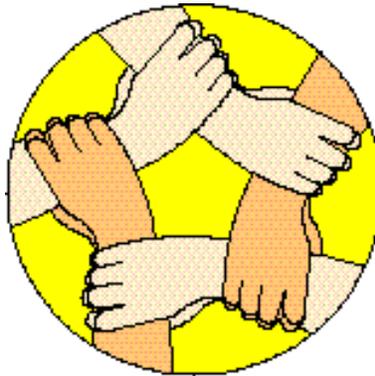
And they shall rebuild the ancient ruins, they will raise up the former devastations, and they will repair the ruined cities, the desolations of many generations. (Isaiah 61:4)

THE REAL MEANING OF “FELLOWSHIP”

Fellowship means a lot of different things to a lot of different people; it can mean anything from sharing a time studying where a small group study the Bible together, to a couple of individuals eating a cruller with their coffee. The Biblical idea of fellowship, however, is much more significant than either of these pictures communicate. How significant? If the Church of today recaptured the early Church's sense of fellowship, the Church would no longer need renewal, and she would again be a light of God's love to the nations. No, I am not over-dramatizing the matter.

In an effort to restore the impact and power of the meaning of fellowship - and, hopefully, encourage the Church to restore its Biblical practice among her people - this issue of Rebuild Journal is dedicated to exploring what it really means to have fellowship.

Rebuild is a quarterly journal dedicated to the renewal of the Church through the restoration of Christian Community. Subscriptions are provided on a "whatever you can afford" basis.: Phone: 970-221-4847/E-mail: rebuild@peakpeak.com/Mailing Address: Rebuild, 2136 Sheffield Drive, Fort Collins, CO., 80526. Those wishing to make tax deductible donations, can make checks payable to: "H.T.O.C.", memo: Rebuild (Summer, 2000)



Get ready to think differently about this subject than you ever have thought about it before!

In the first part of the issue, we are reprinting an excerpt from the book, Building People Through a Caring, Sharing Fellowship (Tyndale House Publishers, 1985) by Donald L. Bubna and Sarah Ricketts.

In the second part of the issue is an article originally published in Discipleship Journal by J. Stephen Lang. It gives an historical perspective of how community was lived out in the early church.

The issue ends with a brief Bible Study around the Greek word that often gets translated as "fellowship" or "community" in our Bibles. The concepts behind this word are not always accurately understood. Most Christians will find the Biblical meaning startling and surprising.

KOINONIA : THE REAL THING

*by Donald Bubna &
Sarah Ricketts*

Loving difficult people isn't "doing what comes naturally." I fail miserably even if I drum up all my willpower. Our only hope is something the Greeks called *koinonia*. The word appears eighteen times in the New Testament, describing a special relationship in the Holy Spirit between man and God and man and other men. It means that my relationship with God and with other Christians is interwoven. My relationship with God is affected by how I get along with my brothers and sisters in the church, and my love for them depends on my relationship with God. I can't really love God without loving other Christians, or the other way around.

Paul wrote to the Corinthians: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the fellowship [*koinonia*] of the Holy Spirit, be with you all" (2 Cor. 13:14, NASB). Paul speaks here of a fellowship with God through the Holy Spirit. This is God wanting to share with us his mercy and grace, his very nature and attributes, through the Holy Spirit. That is how *koinonia* begins; by God sharing with man.

continued inside ...



The second aspect of this sharing is between men. In Philippians 2:1 Paul speaks of "the fellowship [koinonia] of the Spirit." The context shows that this has to do with our fellowship among Christians. *Koinonia* with God and with one another must be in operation together. It is our fellowship with God that supplies the content for real fellowship with one another.

To maintain and nurture the *koinonia* in the Church, Paul later commanded the Christians to keep on being filled with the Holy Spirit: "Don't drink too much wine, for many evils lie along that path; be filled instead with the Holy Spirit, and controlled by him" (Eph. 5:18, TLB).

Spirit-filled Christians should be talking with one another, sharing our life in Christ. We should be praising and worshipping God together. We should always be grateful, and we should be honoring Christ by considering the needs of others before our own. Another word for this is *koinonia*.

We cannot claim the fullness of the Holy Spirit, however deep or intimate our communion with God may seem, if we don't have fellowship with one another. If *koinonia* is lacking in the church, we are not Spirit-filled Christians. We may have spiritual experiences, and exercise spiritual gifts, but we do not have that most obvious fruit of the Spirit-filled life - love for one another (1 John 4:7-10).

Koinonia is a love relationship, but the presence of the Holy Spirit in the church doesn't mean we automatically love one another.

Love and unity can't be produced by us. They are given to the church by the Holy Spirit, but we must maintain and nurture them. When we do, we have *koinonia*.

The word *koinonia* in the Greek also implies a deliberate, deep commitment. It was commonly used to refer to a business partnership or a marriage. The lives and fortunes of business partners

were deeply linked together. That was *koinonia*. So was the enduring commitment of a man and a woman in marriage.

In our day and culture many people shy away from deep commitments. An increasing number of couples live together without a marriage license. Some say it is because they expect their feelings to one day cool off, and they don't want to make any promises they can't keep.

I believe our fear of deep commitments to one another stems from a misunderstanding of what a commitment should be based on. If my promise is based on the hope that I will always have sweet romantic feelings for her, I might not dare commit myself for "as long as we both shall live." Feelings are somewhat beyond my control, and God only knows how I'll feel twenty years from now. If marriage is only based on romantic feelings, I can understand the young couples who hesitate to make lifelong commitments, particularly in view of the phenomenal rise in the divorce rate. After all, we must assume that all the hundreds of thousands of couples who painfully part in the divorce courts once had beautiful feelings for one another and were certain their love would never end.

Some couples rewrite the marriage agreement to what they consider to express a more realistic and honest commitment: to be true to one another "as long as our love shall last." What they obviously mean is: "as long as our beautiful feelings for one another shall last." It is unfortunate that the only word we

have for love has such a limited meaning in daily usage. The Greeks had several words to express different aspects of the thing we simply translate "love."

Jesus could not have meant "beautiful feelings" when he spoke of loving our enemies and loving one another in our families and in the church, because he made it a command. The word Jesus used was *agape*, and if you and I had been Greek-speaking Christians in the first century, we would immediately have known that Jesus was talking about an act of our will, not a state of our emotions. There were other words to describe warm, affectionate feelings of friendship, deep and tender family relationships or strong romantic attraction. The command to practice *agape* love for someone went beyond all the others and would last even when the others had faded or failed.

When we experience being loved that way by God and by someone who loves him, it becomes possible for us to also love with an *agape* love. "We love because he first loved us," wrote the Apostle John. The word he used was *agape*. It is a level of love more mature than the warm, affectionate feelings we had for those who first loved us. It means daring to commit ourselves to love the unlovable no matter what it may cost or how they respond.

This kind of commitment is never easy, but with the *koinonia* of the Holy Spirit it is no longer impossible. The ability to love the unlovable isn't mine, but when I make the decision to *will* to love, Jesus supplies the ability through the Holy Spirit.

Paul wrote: "Be kind to each other, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God has forgiven you because you belong to Christ" (Eph. 4:32, TLB). One of the most incredible examples of this kind of *agape* love took place in our church not long ago. A boy had been killed in a car accident, and following the funeral his parents greeted those of us who had come to share this hour with them. Among the people was the man who had driven the vehicle that took their son's life. He had been to their home, but now he and his wife came once more to express their grief.



"Can you ever forgive me, can you ever forgive me, can you ever forgive me?" he repeated. Hopeless tears coursed down the man's face.

Quietly the parents of the dead boy responded, "We have forgiven you. It is well."

Such a portrait of love God wants the world to see in the church: *koinonia* with God and each other.

I believe that when we experience the forgiveness and love of God and extend it to one another, we are actually foretasting a little bit of heaven. We are told that heaven is a real place and that the New Jerusalem will have streets of gold and pearly gates. But I think heaven is more than a place. I believe the essence of it is *koinonia*, an ever-widening relationship with God and one another. I can get tired of sight-seeing, but I never get tired of growing relationships. I've heard people say, in response to real *koinonia*, "If it can be like this on earth, what is it going to be like in heaven?"

Getting to know God and each other is a lifetime experience, and to think that we will continue in a deepening love for one another throughout eternity is exciting. Real *koinonia* is what Jesus had with the Father, and just before his crucifixion he prayed for his followers:

"My prayer for all of them is that they will be of one heart and mind, just as you and I are, Father - that as you are in me and I am in you, so they will be in us, and the world will believe you sent me" (John 17:21, TLB).

He is saying: "Father, just as you and I have this very unique unity and fellowship, I want the disciples to have the same thing with us." *Koinonia* is the answer to Jesus' prayer that we are to be one with him and with one another. When *koinonia* exists in the church, it allows the church to be the caring, loving community it was meant to be: the portrait of love God wants the world to see.

An elderly man in our fellowship said the other day, "I've been a Christian for over thirty-nine years, but only recently have I begun to discover what God's love really means. Before it was always a vague thing. Now it is becoming personal and real as I sense it in our relationships in the church."

Donald Bubna is currently living in Oregon with his wife, Dee. Together, they have a team ministry of providing encouragement, consultation, and leadership development in local churches.

Sarah (Ricketts) Oftedal is currently living in Alpine, California. She is active in her church, St. John of Damascus Orthodox. She sculpts and writes and is the happy grandmother of eight.

Family Ties: COMMUNITY IN THE EARLY CHURCH

— by J. Stephen Lang —

"Behold, how these Christians love one another." So said a pagan intellectual in the Roman Empire. While his remarks about Christians focused on their lack of intellectual polish, their moral scruples, and their lack of civic loyalty, the critic had to admit that they were a loving fellowship.

The Church, as the New Testament shows, was from the beginning a community based on shared beliefs, shared morals, and concern for the hurting. As seen in Acts, the first believers in Jerusalem practiced a kind of communitarianism, voluntarily sharing their property with other believers. As the Church expanded beyond the Holy City, believers felt a bond with believers in other locales, spurred on by Paul's concern for the struggling Jerusalem church.

For believers across the empire, worship was not mere ritual; it was a genuinely *festive* response to having the "vertical" (man and God) relationship made right. They also celebrated each other, the "horizontal" relationships. God was Father, other believers were brothers and sisters - and the terms were not tossed about thoughtlessly.

Sharing the Wealth

Love was tangibly expressed in worship. All believers were privileged to bring offerings - money, but more often wine, fruits, and grain - and these were later distributed to the needy among the believers. Where there was excess, it was given to nonbelievers, a practice that impressed pagan observers. They could mock the Christian worship services, but they could not mock charity.

The pagans were not totally without compassion. Individuals and government programs worked to alleviate the plight of the poor to some degree. But for the most part, charity was the responsibility of extended families. Christians introduced the radical notion of the family as including all believers in Christ.

In the empire's churches, rich and poor, slave and free, mingled freely. A former slave became bishop of Rome, proof that wealth and breeding were not essentials to leadership in Christ's church. Wealthy believers were generous in helping orphans and widows, something almost unknown among pagans. It was common practice in some areas to will part of one's estate to "Christ our Lord." This legacy was des-



ignated the "alimony of the poor," and was distributed by the Church.

Supporting the Persecuted

Many early believers died in sporadic persecutions throughout the Roman Empire. However, persecution did not always mean death. When the emperors were engaging in anti-Christian campaigns, persons accused of following the "suspicious" religion were often sentenced to work in mines, or they might have all their goods confiscated. The fellowships were quick to come to the aid of these "living martyrs" and their families.

In the year 303, the fiercest persecution took place under Emperor Diocletian, who insisted that the Christians sacrifice to the pagan gods. Death and torture were prevalent, and both individuals and entire churches had their property either destroyed or confiscated. But the survivors did not languish in their new poverty, for the believers who retained the most property helped those who lost everything. Paganism, which was already waning, was dealt another blow by the Christians' display of love to persecuted brethren.

Caring For The Weak

Most Roman citizens saw no moral problem in disposing of an unwanted child, and this included not only the unborn but also newborns. Abortion was widespread in the Roman Empire. Early writings show that Christians were opposed to such practices, applying the gospels and epistles' admonitions to protect the weak and oppressed.

Like the Greeks, the Romans were obsessed with physical perfection. Children with birth

defects would be abandoned to the elements: wolves, vultures, or inclement weather. If, as a child grew, other defects - such as mental retardation - manifested themselves, the family would send him to live in squalor on the city's outskirts. Some were even killed.

But the Christians welcomed these outcasts, unless their feeble-mindedness was so severe that they disrupted worship.

Knowing No Boundaries

The early Christians' fellowship extended beyond parish boundaries. Paul's epistles set the precedent for believers in one locale by sending words of care and admonition to another city. Clement of Rome wrote a famous epistle to the church at Corinth, and Ignatius of Antioch wrote - on his way to be executed - epistles to a number of churches. This was not regarded as impudent nosiness but as loving consideration for the ever spreading churches.

Ironically, the sense of community in the Church began to abate in the fourth century, as Christianity was made legal and gradually became the state religion. But although persecution tends to make fellowship more vibrant, we can follow the example of the early Church no matter what our circumstances. We, too, can buck the self-serving spirit of our age and band together to live as the family of God.

J. STEPHEN LANG is currently living in Florida. He is also the author of The Complete Book of Bible Trivia (Tyndale House, 1988).



The Meaning of Community: A Brief Bible Study

What Does "Community" and "Fellowship" Mean?

The word "community" is used almost everywhere: First *Community* Bank and Trust, *Community* Civic Center, the professional *community*, in the mayor's address, "As a civil servant of our fair *Community* of Dry Gulch..." The *Community* Metroplex, etc.. You get the idea. Well, what exactly does community mean? The way most people use the word today, it can refer to virtually any place, and any grouping of people. The New Testament meaning of the word is much more specific.

According to New Testament usage, the words *community*, *fellowship*, *sharing* and *communion* come from the **same** root Greek word, *koinonia* (). To those living in New Testament times, fellowship connoted a deep, loyal, and lasting interpersonal commitment.

Let's look at the original force of this word by surveying what a number of noteworthy Biblical scholars have written about it.

The Biblical idea of community and New Testament synonyms for community are:

"Association, communion, fellowship, close relationship (hence a favorite expression for the marital relationship as the most intimate between human beings.)"

The principle focus of community:

“The main element in koinonia [] is that of fellowship. Hence the word is especially adapted to express inner relationship.”

“... It expresses a **two-sided relation** ... emphasis may be on either the **giving** or the **receiving**... It thus means 1) “**participation**,” 2) “**impartation**,” 3) “**fellowship**” ... in law, a **contract of partnership**... community of possession or communal possession.”

Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Ed. Gerhard Kittel

The above shows the significance of the concept; now let’s look at what four Bible scholars say the word koinonia actually *means* :

• "Koinonia is the spirit of generous sharing as contrasted with the spirit of selfish getting. In the contemporary colloquial Greek *koinonia* has three distinctive meanings.

(1) It means very commonly a **business partnership**.

(2) It is used especially of **marriage**. Two people enter into marriage in order to have ‘**koinonia of life**,’ that is to say, **to live together a life in which everything is shared**.

(3) It is used of a man’s relationship with God... The Christian *koinonia* is

that bond which binds Christians to each other, to Christ and to God.” [editor’s emphasis]

New Testament Words, William Barclay

Fellowship and community is about living in love, as God loves. It is for this reason that God gives us to one another...

• “*Koinonia* [κοινωνία] implies a closeness of union approaching identity... With St. John indeed it is the predominant and determining note of Christianity. For the Fellowship as defined by him is only another word for that brotherhood or brotherly love (*filadelfia*) which makes the difference between darkness and light (1John 2:9f), and is therefore the essential characteristic of one who calls himself a Christian...” [editor’s italics]

Expositor, "The Fellowship [Koinonia] of Acts II:42 and Cognate Words,"

Arthur Carr

• “In community there exists a relation between individuals which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and each other.”

Word Studies in the New Testament, Marvin Vincent

• “These two words [fellowship, communion] are the translations of *Koinonia*. This Greek word is used in a *marriage contract* where the husband and wife agree to a joint participation in the necessities of life. *The key idea in the word is that of a partnership, possessing things in common, a belonging to.*” [my italics]

Word Studies in the Greek New Testament, Kenneth Wuest

Let’s now try to pull together all of these ideas and offer a summary. A composite definition of fellowship or community (which, remember, come from the same word) might be...

Christian fellowship is an intimate relationship of divine love between God and the Christian and between the Christian and other Christians, where each P(p)erson shares H(h)is life with the O(o)ther.

Wow! That is a lot more than having coffee and donuts together! A whole lot more.

Those who have fellowship with God are called to *live* out that fellowship with those who are in

communion with Him. Kononia burns and buries all “Me-and-God-alone” views on the Christian life.

This will come as a lightning bolt to the brain for many, but fellowship - *genuine Bible fellowship* - is the fundamental way that Christians are to experience the fellowship of God.

Here is what the Bible says:

What we have seen and heard we proclaim to you also, that you also may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:3)

The Church’s primary identity is not the particular denomination with which it may be affiliated, the road on which the building it meets in is located, or its city. The chief characteristic of the Church is to be an environment where believers experience and express their *fellowship*. Or to restate this in light of the study above, the chief characteristic of the Church should be within the context of relationships where people give themselves to God and one another, in loyalty, commitment, and the significant sharing of their entire lives.

Fellowship and community are about living in love, as God loves. We cannot do this on our own,

and God knows it. It is for this reason (out of many other reasons) that God gives us to one another. In the sharing of our lives, we can practice loving in the manner in which He loves. This is more than simply “getting together” for a social event, or even for Bible Study. This is getting together because we *belong* to Him, and to one another. This is the fact, no matter what we do or do not do.

So the next time someone asks you over for “fellowship” and coffee, stop and think, “Does my host realize what he/she is asking?” And, if he/she does know what he/she was intending, ask yourself another question, “Do I

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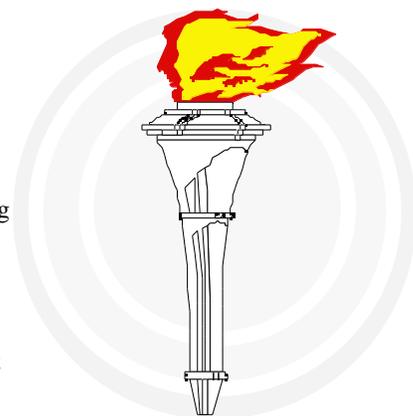
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want to do this, to give my life away to others like this?" Jesus says that if we belong to Him, that last question has already been answered.

"... even as I have loved you, that you also are to love one another. By this will all men know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another." (John 13:33,34)

Editor

***Special Notice:
Rebuild Journal on
Special Hiatus***

The publishing of *Rebuild Journal* will be on hold for several months as we give ourselves to complete work on our Web site, as well as attend to other immediate matters in our community.

We truly believe that the message and vision of intentional Christian Community is one that needs to be heard, especially in the Western world, but we recognize that we are not the only "voice" that needs to be heard and, more fundamentally, faithfulness to the Lord's direction is more needful than doing anything, anywhere.

So where does that leave *Rebuild Journal*? For the short term, *Rebuild* will not be published but we do have all intentions to republish again sometime within the next year.

Until then, if you have any questions, or know of any way that we can be of service to you, please do not hesitate to get in touch (email: [Rebuild@ peak peak .com](mailto:Rebuild@peak.peak.com)).

God's blessings to you as you seek first His kingdom!

Rev. Jordan Bajis, the current editor of *Rebuild Journal*, is also the pastor of Holy Trinity Orthodox Church in Fort Collins, Colorado. For the last 20 years Jordan has sought to encourage the Church to rediscover her Covenant foundations through serving as missionary, pastor, author, and lecturer.

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