



Intro:

Last night in my weekly letter I expanded on a portion of UCG Chairman Len Martin's message in the UCG Home Office Update. The summary of his message is **We have been called out of this world into a relationship with God, Jesus Christ and each other.**

The biblical word Len Martin used was fellowship... But before he got to that word, he asked some penetrating questions. I would like to repeat them as an introduction to my message today:

The planning, budgeting, scheduling, etc., is necessary so that things can be done decently and in order (1 Corinthians 14:40). This is true whether it is happening globally—as with the Council of Elders, national councils and home office administration—or locally in your own congregation. However, these activities are a means to an end, not the end in and of itself. We must never lose sight of why we do the things we do—why we attend Sabbath services every week, why we observe the annual Holy Days at their appointed times, why we tithe, why we observe food laws, why we examine ourselves, and so much more.

When the scribes and Pharisees wanted to know why Jesus' disciples did not follow their own man-made traditions, Jesus turned it back on them, asking, "Why do you also transgress the commandment of God because of your tradition?" (Matthew 15:3). He took it a step further, quoted from Isaiah and said, "These people draw near to me with their mouth, and honor me with their lips, but their heart is far from me. And in vain they worship me, teaching as doctrines the commandments of men" (Matthew 15:8-9).

Has our worship and devotion to God become mere lip-service, void of meaning and purpose? Have we forgotten why we do the things we do? Do we simply go on year-after-year, forgetting what the final outcome is intended to be as a result of what we are doing? Are we worshipping in vain?

In his letter he then moves to the subject of fellowship and what it truly means:

In just over six weeks from now, we will repeat the cycle of the annual "feasts of the LORD" (Leviticus 23) beginning with Passover and the Days of Unleavened Bread. In the days ahead we will be reminded of the responsibility to examine ourselves, to put sin out of our lives and seek reconciliation with God and each other.

The Greek word most often translated "sin" in the New Testament is hamartia and it is an archery term for "missing the mark." So while we examine ourselves, we should look for where we are missing the mark—where our lives do not mirror the perfect righteous character of our elder brother and the only perfect standard, Jesus Christ. Once we identify our sins, we repent and go forward. The more we do this, the closer we get to hitting the mark!

*As we repeat this process of examination and change, **it is intended to bring us all together into a close personal relationship with each other, the Father and Jesus Christ. The Greek word most often used in the New Testament to describe this relationship is koinonia. Strong's describes it as a "partnership, that is, (literally) participation."** In the English language the word is translated fellowship. But it is not merely the socializing we do before and after services, but it is the relationship we have with the Father, Jesus Christ and each other 24 hours a day, seven days a week.*

Specific Purpose of Today's Message:

Today I challenge you to become involved in taking our normal "fellowship" and socializing to the next level. Let's supercharge fellowship to make it a dynamic tool for building and strengthening our relationships, both with each other and with God the Father and Jesus Christ!

Need:

Ephesians 5:15 NKJV - See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise,

Ephesians 5:16 NKJV - **redeeming the time**, because the days are evil.

Ephesians 5:17 NKJV - Therefore do not be unwise, but understand what the will of the Lord [is].

Ephesians 5:18 NKJV - And do not be drunk with wine, in which is dissipation; but be filled with the Spirit,

Ephesians 5:19 NKJV - speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord,

Ephesians 5:20 NKJV - giving thanks always for all things to God the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ,

Ephesians 5:21 NKJV - submitting to one another in the fear of God.

Colossians 4:2 NKJV - Continue earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving;
Colossians 4:3 NKJV - meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,
Colossians 4:4 NKJV - that I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.
Colossians 4:5 NKJV - Walk in wisdom toward those [who are] outside, redeeming the time.
Colossians 4:6 NKJV - [Let] your speech always [be] with grace, seasoned with salt, **that you may know how you ought to answer each one.**

From Len Martin: *Has our worship and devotion to God become mere lip-service, void of meaning and purpose? Have we forgotten why we do the things we do? Do we simply go on year-after-year, forgetting what the final outcome is intended to be as a result of what we are doing? Are we worshipping in vain?*

Are we fellowshiping in vain? How can we make it better?

Importance of Fellowship

2 Corinthians 8:1 NKJV - Moreover, brethren, we make known to you the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia:
2 Corinthians 8:2 NKJV - that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded in the riches of their liberality.
2 Corinthians 8:3 NKJV - For I bear witness that according to [their] ability, yes, and beyond [their] ability, [they were] freely willing,
2 Corinthians 8:4 NKJV - **imploring us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.**
2 Corinthians 8:5 NKJV - And not [only] as we had hoped, but they first gave themselves to the Lord, and [then] to us by the will of God.

Fellowship = G2842 = κοινωμία koinōnía, koy-nohn-ee'-ah; from [G2844](#); partnership, i.e. (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction:—(to) communicate(-ation), communion, (contri-)distribution, fellowship.

The KJV translates Strong's G2842 in the following manner: [fellowship](#) (12x), [communion](#) (4x), [communication](#) (1x), [distribution](#) (1x), [contribution](#) (1x), [to communicate](#) (1x).

From Outline of Biblical Usage:

- I. fellowship, association, community, communion, **joint participation**, intercourse
 - A. the share which one has in anything, **participation**
 - B. intercourse, fellowship, intimacy
 1. the right hand as a sign and pledge of fellowship (in fulfilling the apostolic office)
 - C. a gift jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship

Fellowship is part of discipleship - making disciples. Teaching and growing as followers of God the Father and Jesus Christ. Our conversation should revolve around spiritual topics, not just the physical.

Our conversations should go to the next level - discussing and growing in what is truly important.

Don't be afraid of exposing that you don't know everything. We ALL need to learn and grow:

2 Peter 3:14 NKJV - Therefore, beloved, looking forward to these things, be diligent to be found by Him in peace, without spot and blameless;

2 Peter 3:15 NKJV - and consider [that] the longsuffering of our Lord [is] salvation--as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you,

2 Peter 3:16 NKJV - as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable [people] twist to their own destruction, as [they do] also the rest of the Scriptures.

2 Peter 3:17 NKJV - You therefore, beloved, since you know [this] beforehand, beware lest you also fall from your own steadfastness, being led away with the error of the wicked;

2 Peter 3:18 NKJV - **but grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.** To Him [be] the glory both now and forever. Amen.

Fellowship:

Acts 2:42 NKJV - And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.

Romans 15:26 NKJV - For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

1 Corinthians 1:9 NKJV - God [is] faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 10:16 NKJV - The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

2 Corinthians 6:14 NKJV - Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness?

2 Corinthians 13:14 NKJV - The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit [be] with you all. Amen.

Galatians 2:9 NKJV - and when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that had been given to me, they gave me and Barnabas the right hand of fellowship, that we [should go] to the Gentiles and they to the circumcised.

1 John 1:3 NKJV - that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship [is] with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:6 NKJV - If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth.

1 John 1:7 NKJV - But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.

How to implement and supercharge fellowship:

It was important to the Macedonians, they implored Paul with urgency. It is notable that their desire and urgency are recorded for us to see as an example of how we should be, and what we should do. But it is up to us to see how we can apply this principle in Montana in 2024. It might be easier to do when we gather for services, but how to we

do it during the other Sabbaths when we don't have services and during the week? And how do we fellowship with those that are too far away to come to services? That live beyond a reasonable travel distance? or have moved out the state and may be living in a location where there isn't a local congregation?

It has been said that making disciples is about building relationships with people. What tools and technologies do we have at our disposal that will enable us to build relationships, to encourage, edify, and build up one another, to fellowship, and actually "disciple" one another and those God is calling?

This leads to the next challenge of welcoming and fellowshiping with the new converts God is calling to Christ, His way, and His Church. How can we welcome them into the faith? How can we help them to grow and overcome the challenges they are facing? Can we remember the challenges we faced with jobs, family, and friends? Can we remember the many questions we had, but may have been afraid to ask?

I remember reading in a book on discipleship years ago where the author's main point seemed to be that unless a new convert, that is, a person new to the truth made friends in a congregation, they were unlikely to stay. They would not put down roots that would sustain them in that congregation. It is sorta like the parable of the sower and the seed in Matthew 13. We usually focus on spreading the seed and are not concerned about the ground that the seed falls on. But what can we do to help that new seed to grow and live, to send down deep roots? Can we water it? Can we provide shade to protect it from the hot sun? Can we provide more soil or compost or fertilizer? Can we talk to it? Can we pray for it?

What are the chances the seed will survive and grow if it is neglected? It seems the brethren in Macedonia (Philippi, Thessalonica, & Berea) were concerned about their fellow followers of God and Christ that were being called, and serving them and fellowshiping with them. I believe their example was recorded as an example for us to follow today.

Conclusion:

In recent months Val and I are seeing God's hand at work in Montana. He is opening more people's mind to His word. Many are contacting us and wanting to talk and find out more about His way, and about the Church - this body of believers that are striving to live the way God wants us to. We all need to be prepared to do our part to help them grow and become solid members of the body of Christ. I believe fellowship is probably a much more important part of that than we may have realized. Let's continue to pray that God would send more individuals into His body... and also pray and contemplate how we can help these individuals grow and survive. Let's be seeking God's guidance and praying that His love will flow through us... and that we will all grow in our relationship and fellowship with God, Jesus Christ, and one another!

Additional Resources:

Len Martin's letter: <https://www.ucg.org/members/news/home-office-weekly-update-march-7-2024>