

The Fellowship of the Saints

Scripture Reading: I Thessalonians 1:4-10; 2:1-20

A true believer / follower of Christ is a partaker of Christ. This involves salvation, holiness, fellowship, worship, service, and a future kingdom and glory (Hebrews 3:14). Our series is covering these areas of which we partake (share / participate):

- His gospel call / promise – Hebrews 3:1; Ephesians 3:6
- His nature / holiness / power – II Peter 1:4; Hebrews 12:8-10
- His people / unity, fellowship, and grace – Philippians 1:7; I Corinthians 9:19-23
- His gospel work / fruitful labors – John 15:1-8, 16; Philippians 1:11; 4:13
- His sufferings – Philippians 3:10; II Timothy 1:7-8; II Corinthians 1:3-7; I Peter 4:12-14
- His kingdom & glory – I Peter 5:1; Colossians 1:12-13, 25-27
- His warnings & corrections – Hebrews 12:5-10

This lesson will continue our focus on being a partaker with His people.

An extension of our participation / our fellowship with Christ, with His gospel, and partaking of His divine nature is to participate / to fellowship with Christ's people and to partake of the Spirit of Christ that is within other individual believers / followers of Christ. We took time to mention the desire we should have to seek for more people to become believers / followers of Christ. We extend that now to fellowship / partnership with a local church and other churches of like faith. This is an active / interactive working relationship (Ephesians 1:15; Colossians 1:4; Philemon 1:5,7).

We cannot unite all churches. The divisions of belief and practice are too vast for a universal working relationship. We should strive to unite all fellow Christians (Ephesians 6:23-24) spiritually. But we cannot untangle the denominational confusion that has built up over 2000 years. As best we can, we should try to encourage and cooperate with other churches who hold to basic fundamental truth. There was an ideal in the days of the Apostles, causing them to rally all churches together. But that ideal slipped away, over the years. The spirit of antichrist and the doctrine of demons started grotesque doctrinal and practical divisions, so that there eventually could be no monolithic organizational uniformity among the professed churches.

Times of unity and harmony – Acts 9:31; 14:23; 15:41; 16:5; Romans 16:16; I Corinthians 4:17; 7:17; 11:16; 14:33; 16:19 Galatians 1:1-3; Colossians 4:15-16 [cp. I Thessalonians 5:27]; I Timothy 3:14-15.

Times of Division and Descent begin – Acts 20:28-32; 15:1-2; Galatians 1:6-7; 3:1; 5:5-10; 6:12; Romans 16:17-19 [cp. Philippians 3:16-19]; I Corinthians 1:9-10; 3:1-3 [cp. 12:25-27; Ephesians 4:1-16]; II Corinthians 11:1-3, 13-15; Colossians 2:6-8, 18-23; I Timothy 1:3-11; 4:1-2; 6:3-5; II Timothy 2:14-18; 4:1-4; Titus 1:5-16; James 3:13-18; II Peter 2:1-3; I John 2:18-26; 4:1-6; II John 1:6-11; Jude 1:3-4, 16-19; Revelation 1:11; 2:7,11,17,23,29; 3:6,13,22; 22:16-19.

Now, let's consider the example of the Thessalonian church in I Thessalonians 1:4-10; 2:1-20.

A work of God was notable among the people of the Thessalonian church. The Holy Spirit made the preaching of the gospel fruitful, changing people's lives (**I Thessalonians 1:4-5**).

The church at Thessalonica began to follow the teachings and examples of the Apostle Paul and the others who were with him (**I Thessalonians 1:6-7**).

They did this, not as followers of men, but rather as followers of the Lord (**I Thessalonians 2:13**).

They became examples to other churches (**I Thessalonians 1:7-10**).

They also became followers of the examples of other churches (**I Thessalonians 2:14**).

There was no hierarchy. No superior governmental structure was over all the churches. These churches shared the same faith from the same truths of Scripture and had the same Spirit of Christ guiding them all. The work of the Apostles was to preach, teach, guide, and set an example with their lives (**I Thessalonians 2:1-12**).

This labor among the Thessalonian church was not done in a dictatorial authoritarian way; nor was it a money-making scheme. They actually suffered much from the enemies of the gospel. The Apostle Paul, along with the others, operated with love and found great joy in their labors. They looked to the Lord for help and for future reward (**I Thessalonians 2:14-20**).

Are we receiving the ministry of the Scriptures as a work of God in our lives? Do we consider that our response to the Lord involves having a partnership with other of the Lord's people in a church that is based on gospel truth?

Consider Acts 2:41-42. As people repented and believed, they were baptized and added to the church. Then they continued steadfastly / devoted themselves to the Apostle's doctrine. They also continued steadfastly / devoted themselves to fellowship – only there is a definite article in the Greek text – “**the** fellowship” (Note: the ESV). So it is not just the act of fellowshiping. It is the fellowship as a group that they were committed to – a partnership; a working relationship with the Lord and with other believers.

Remember the Lord's teaching that we are His sheep and He is our shepherd (Psalm 23; 100; John 10:1-30). Sheep operate in flocks (Acts 20:28-29; I Peter 5:1-3; John 10:27-30). As the sheep follow the shepherd, they also find themselves with the other sheep of the flock. Don't wander.