

Christian Fellowship

“Be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you.”
—*Ephesians 4:32*

IN OUR FEATURED SCRIPTURE, the Apostle Paul speaks of the kind and tenderhearted disposition that marks every Christian who has been called in Christ Jesus during this present Gospel Age. In the New Testament, the word “fellowship” has

been translated from a Greek word which means “partnership or participation,” and suggests a common communication in belief and practice.

This common goal is well expressed, as we read, “They continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.” (Acts 2:42) All the teachings of the apostles pertained to Jesus, the Christ of promise. They relate to his part in the divine plan, and the Christian’s relationship to him. Thus, Paul confirms, “I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God. For I determined

not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.”—I Cor. 2:1,2

The fundamental truths of the Bible are centered in Jesus Christ and are therefore essential to true Christian fellowship. To whatever extent there may be disagreement on the basic teachings, there would in that proportion be a lack of full fellowship. The brethren enjoy sweet and blessed fellowship when they abide in the teachings that have been imparted to them by Jesus and his apostles.

A proper appreciation of the truths that pertain to the divine plan, and our Lord Jesus' part in that plan, will lead to godlikeness in our attitude and actions toward one another. The thought was expressed by Paul in our opening scripture as marked by kindness, tenderness, and the spirit of forgiveness toward others of like precious faith, and are essential elements of true Christian fellowship.

There must be a large measure of selflessness on the part of those who enjoy the true fellowship of the Lord's people. Paul wrote, “We then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.”—Rom 15:1-3

The apostle was quoting from an Old Testament prophecy concerning Jesus, which says, “The zeal of thine house hath eaten me up; and the reproaches of them that reproached thee are fallen upon me. When I wept, and chastened my soul with fasting, that was to my reproach.” (Ps. 69:9,10) In Paul's letter to the Romans, he then added, “Whatsoever

things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.”—Rom. 15:4

The Apostle Peter explains that it was through the prophets that the Holy Spirit had been testified—“Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.”—I Pet. 1:11

An important aspect of Christian fellowship is to share in Christ’s sufferings. In this connection, we read, “If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister; Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body’s sake, which is the church.”—Col. 1:23,24

Paul also explained, “That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death.” (Phil. 3:10) Again, he wrote, “Unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake.”—chap. 1:29

The supreme objective of our Christian life is to glorify God. “Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be likeminded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: That ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.”—Rom. 15:5-7 ■