

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Philippians 1:3-5 ... "I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, for your fellowship in the gospel..."

The word "fellowship" is a word that has lost some of its original meaning from how it is used in the Bible. Today when a church announces a "fellowship dinner," or an event in which youth can fellowship together, it often means PARTY TIME. There is usually no stipulation that those who gather for such a fellowship should be believers. They only have to want to eat, sing, dance and play games. It is okay if your church does gatherings like that, but it would be more appropriate to call them outreach events, and you should use them to introduce unsaved persons to the Body of Christ.

The Bible demonstrates a consistent definition for the word "fellowship," which is the bringing together of people united by their relationship with Christ; people with like passions and interests, but above all, a commitment to following Christ. Today's passage in verse 5 reads "your fellowship in the gospel," which reflects the unity of believers and recognizes our relationship with Christ, our commitment to serve him, and our efforts to obey him. The Bible never (as far as I can find) uses the word for gatherings of mixed persons – believers and unbelievers – or only to have a fun time.

Christian fellowship is very important because it creates moments wherein believers can temporarily step away from the cares and struggles of the world, and associate with other believers. That solidifies the concept of our spiritual family, in other words, the "Body of Christ." Fellowship can rejuvenate believers who are suffering from fatigue, stress, and grief, because in the presence of other Christ followers, you can find hope and encouragement. If you go to a fellowship meeting, the Holy Spirit may lead you to pray for or counsel another struggling believer. Fellowship can inspire you. When you are around other believers, you will hear and see how God is moving in their lives or using them to serve God. That can kick you out of your comfort zone and get you moving in the direction for which you were created, which is to serve God.

Attending parties and dinners hosted by your church is a fine idea. Sending your children to youth swim parties and picnics orchestrated by the youth pastor is wonderful. Having friends over to your home for lunch or games is also an excellent activity. But, we might want to reserve the word "fellowship," as it is used in the Bible: A gathering of Christ followers, united in the spread of the gospel, and celebrating the death and resurrection of Christ. If that includes a meal or worship, all the better. But if the focus is mainly on having a good time, it is not really fellowship as defined in the Bible.

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