

The Fellowship Factor

Living for Christ *Better* by Loving Him *Together*

Daryl Wingerd

Christians who hold each other accountable by regularly asking each other to confess sins they have committed are restraining each other from sinning. The knowledge that someone is going to ask you to tell the truth about your behavior provides a significant deterrent. This kind of “tell the truth” accountability is one important aspect of fellowship, but resisting temptation solely to avoid shame or disapproval from others is not a uniquely Christian motive. *No one* enjoys confessing their failures, and *anyone*—Christian or otherwise—can be motivated to avoid certain actions through accountability with other likeminded people.

There is another important and effective aspect of fellowship. It complements the type of accountability I mentioned above by making the fellowship uniquely Christian. I am referring to the fellowship of knowing, loving, and obeying Christ *together*.

Fellowship increases knowledge. The better you know Jesus, the more you will love Him, and your fellowship with other Christians helps you know Him better. You might be able to perceive a great deal of truth about the glories of Christ, or about what pleases and displeases Him, from studying God’s Word on your own, but no one should think of himself as independent in the learning process. Other Christians will perceive more than you can on your own—things you never noticed in the Bible or thought of in your meditation on Scripture. When another believer shares something wonderful about Jesus, or something to avoid because it grieves Him, your own heart is blessed by the additional knowledge. But this would have been lost to you (at least for the time being) were it not for the fellowship you shared in knowing and loving Him together. This is God’s design. He never intended for believers to know or love Christ in isolation from other believers (see Col. 3:16).

Fellowship increases love. Love for Christ is the mark of every true believer (see 1 Cor. 16:22). You simply cannot know Him without loving Him. Furthermore, fellowship that is centered on Christ increases everyone’s love for Him. No longer do you merely say in your heart, “I think Jesus is wonderful,” you now say, “*We all* think He is wonderful.” No only do *you* think of Him with warm affection and praise, *your closest friends* think and speak about Him in these ways. Not only do *you* trust and depend upon Him to provide for your needs and walk with you through every trial, *you all* depend upon Him, and together you gain an even greater appreciation for His faithfulness. Not only do *you* find Him worthy of the sacrifices that the Christian life calls for, *your brothers and sisters in Christ* make those same sacrifices. You all encourage each other to love Christ in these ways, and in loving Him *together*, everyone comes to love Him *more*.

Fellowship increases obedience. Jesus said, “If you love Me, you will keep My commandments” (John 14:15). But if love for Christ motivates an *individual* commitment to holiness, shared love for Christ becomes the bond that unites groups of Christians in a *shared* commitment to holiness. It is no longer merely, “I resist the temptation to sin because *I* love Jesus,” but, “I resist the temptation to sin because *we* love Jesus.” People are careful to avoid offending someone they esteem highly, but they are more careful to avoid offending that person if *all of their best friends* esteem him highly as well.

Fellowship with other Christians allows you to see and feel something about your sin that a lone Christian cannot. As much as we might hate to admit it, there is something intangible about offending Jesus when we sin against Him. We know our sin grieves Him because the Bible tells us it does, but we cannot see Him with our physical eyes, and we have no observable contact with His expressions of grief. But by loving Jesus in committed fellowship with a local church, we *can* see what grieving Him looks and feels like when we see and feel how it affects our believing brothers and sisters. Just as Paul was persecuting Jesus when he persecuted the church (Acts 9:5), the Christian who troubles the local church by sinning is troubling Jesus Himself.

The Christian man, for example, who confesses sexual sin to his brothers in Christ, should detect a measure of Christ’s pain, disapproval, understanding, and forgiveness in their reactions. He should see Christ’s earnest concern as they labor with him in prayer for true repentance. He may even hear Christ’s sorrow in their weeping, and sense His indignation at the knowledge that another Christian (i.e., the man’s wife) has been deeply offended. The Christian woman who confesses her doubt, greed, or bitterness to her sisters in Christ should learn something of what she has done to Christ Himself when she sees the troubled expressions on their faces and hears their concerned, yet forgiving voices. She should sense a measure of Christ’s burden for her soul when she learns that they lose sleep for the sake of praying for her in her weakness. The point is, through truly *Christian* fellowship, offending Christ is no longer just a theological reality. Through fellowship, the intangible becomes tangible.

Christians become Christians one by one as the Spirit opens blind eyes and grants saving faith, but fellowship with other believers is the fertile soil in which every individual believer is meant to grow strong and bear fruit. Please do not neglect this spiritual benefit in your own pursuit of holiness. Unite yourself with other believers by joining in committed fellowship with a sound, Bible-believing local church where you can know, love, and obey Jesus together. As the proverb says, “He who separates himself seeks his own desire, he quarrels against all sound wisdom” (Prov. 18:1).

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