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The Importance of Fellowship

by Zac Poonen

The word 'fellowship' is a new covenant word. The fellowship spoken of in the new covenant is patterned after the fellowship that Jesus and the Father had with each other during Jesus' earthly days. Jesus' prayer was that the fellowship among His disciples would be of the same order.

Under the old covenant, although people could rise to great heights of holiness, yet they could not come into fellowship with each other. There were godly men under the old covenant - Moses, Elijah, Daniel and John the Baptist, to name but a few. These men had a holiness that exceeded the holiness of most of today's believers. But that is because most of today's believers have not entered into the new covenant.

The new covenant leads the disciples of Jesus into an inward sanctification, that in turn leads to fellowship one with another. When we read of the great men of faith in Heb. 11, we see that they were all lonely individuals. This is how it was in Old Testament times. But as soon as we turn to the New Testament, we find Jesus sending out His disciples two by two. This was something new. Jesus came not only to lead us to an inward sanctification but also to fellowship.

If a believer comes to a life of victory over sin inwardly, and yet does not come into fellowship with others, there is something drastically lacking in his sanctification. Sanctification without fellowship is a deception. Many are travelling around the world today, preaching holiness; but they themselves are lonely individuals like those in Old Testament times. Such preachers are still under the old covenant. Invariably it will be seen that they have not built any fellowship in the place that they reside.

But it was not so with the apostles in the first century. Soon after the day of Pentecost, we read of Peter and John going out together. Peter told the lame man in the temple to look at both John and himself (Acts 3:4). Peter and John worked as a team. On the day of Pentecost, even though it was Peter who preached, yet we read that he stood up with the eleven (Acts 2:14). Fellowship is the one thing that stands out when we read Acts chapters 2 to 4.

Peter and John were not men of similar temperament. They were vastly different as human beings. Peter was the quick and active type - quick to boast that he would never deny the Lord, quick to jump into the sea of Galilee, as soon as he saw the Lord by the shore (Jn. 21), etc., John, on the other hand, was the quiet meditative type who loved to be alone and to see visions of heavenly things (as at Patmos). God always brings together people who are dissimilar (humanly speaking), in the church - so that He can demonstrate a unity in diversity that is far more glorious than the unity of two similar people becoming one.