

Articles and Sermons :: Companionship by Oliver Peng**Companionship by Oliver Peng, on: 2010/10/7 0:08**

“Do two men walk together unless they have made an agreement?”
(Amos 3:3).

“I am a companion of all those who fear Thee, and of those who keep
Thy precepts” (Ps. 119:63).

In God’s economy, spiritual companionship occupies a significant place from the get-go. After the creation of man, God said, “it is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a helper suitable for him” (Gen 2:18). Did God fail to anticipate Adam’s loneliness that He had to implement another operation to save him from the pain of loneliness? Of course not. He could have simultaneously created man and woman in one single act. But then, man would not have known the pain that stemmed from the lack of companionship and the joy of sharing and fellowshiping with a counterpart who understood him and was willing to share life’s journey with him.

Since God created man a tripartite being with spirit, soul and body, companionship has to be much more than merely meeting a physical need. After Adam carefully examined every cattle, beast and bird that was brought before him, he found none “suitable” for him (Gen. 2:20). There is reason to believe that Adam’s need for companionship was not only physical but also spiritual in nature. With Adam’s intelligence, after examining just one cattle, one beast, and one bird, he would have known beyond any doubt that they were totally incompatible to him – so far as physical companionship went. Any further looking would have been a colossal waste of his time.

Yet there he was, checking and naming carefully every cattle, every beast, and every bird! He must have been looking for spiritual companionship as well.

It should be noted that many young men and women make physical attractions their only criteria in their search for suitable companions. Spiritual companionship is often neglected. This has to be a major factor in the many failed marriages. May the Lord grant us wisdom to see the importance of spiritual companionship.

There is a spiritual significance in creating man first in order to underscore man’s need for companionship. From the very beginning, the Lone-Ranger mentality never entered God’s design. God made Adam and Eve individually to show how much He cared for each one of us as individuals, but men were not meant to be individualistic. God intended for men to be precious individuals, but not become individualistic.

The word “companion” includes the thoughts of walking together, sharing, friendship, fellowship, bearing the same burden, and oneness. In the New Testament, Jesus sent His disciples out two by two. In the book of Acts, Paul was always accompanied, when possible, by traveling companions in his missionary journeys. Apparently, having friends along side who share the same vision, bear the same burden and labor together towards the same goal are important elements in doing the Lord’s work.

The only New Testament worker who struck out on his own – Apollos – was shown to be wanting and in need of being taught “more fully the ways of God” by Paul’s coworkers Priscilla and Aquila (Acts 18: 24-26). Barnabas,

on the other hand, who separated from Paul still knew the importance of taking a co-worker on his missionary journey.

In the temptation of Eve, one of the things that led to her poor judgment was the neglect in seeking fellowship from her companion. Paul seemed to underscore this point when he wrote to Timothy, "And it was not Adam who was deceived, but the woman being quite deceived, fell into transgression" (I Tim 2:14). From the strategy to deceive Eve, it is not hard to see that the Enemy's way of frustrating God's purpose was to trivialize companionship.

Today, the Enemy's strategy hasn't changed. He seeks to trivialize companionship and fellowship among God's children by, among other things, instituting clergy-laity system in which only a select group of seminary-trained and institution-minded individuals, a.k.a. clergy, are qualified to intimate God's mind and speak for Him. When Christians face important decisions or want questions answered, they seek out pastors, preachers and ministers for counsel; whether they have a close companionship with such "men of God" is of no concern.

There is reason to believe that the trivialization of spiritual companionship which results in a lack of relatedness among the Lord's people, is one huge problem facing the Church today.

When a minister goes to visit his flock, it is a top-down, clergy-laity, teacher-student relationship. This model, by nature and by design, inhibits free flow of fellowship. When fellowship is limited, the comprehension of the mind of Christ is also diminished.

Companionship on the other hand brings everyone down to the same level where friendship and intimacy have a chance to blossom. Likeminded saints can enter into each other's travails and share each other's joy. Fellowship is usually much sweeter, prayers are usually more effective, and comprehension of Christ much deeper.

The churches are run as institutions much the same way like corporations with CEO's, experts, organizational charts, plans and goals, committees, boards, etc.... Such being the case, it is no wonder that Christians think it normal to rely on the clergy to counsel and solve their problems much the same way an Accountant is expected to solve tax problems. The clergy has become the paid professionals.

Christians are unwilling to, neither are they interested in, developing companionship with fellow-Christians in order to search out and apprehend the riches and fullness of Christ. There is a price involved in developing companionship; it doesn't just fall into our laps. The nominal believers tend to be unwilling to pay the price. On the other hand, the gifted, eloquent and zealous believers tend to be self-reliant, if not outright self-conceited. Surely they do not need anyone's help in finding the Lord's will and getting spiritual answers—least of all from untrained and ungifted little brothers and sisters. Or do they...?

Paul says in Eph. 3:18-19, "may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God." Clearly, a Lone Ranger who has no regard for "all the saints," can never come into full knowledge and experience the fullness of God—it is simply not meant to.

Since being "filled up to all the fullness of God" is a result of learning to "comprehend with all the saints," then spiritual companionship is obviously the key. So, the important question is, how can we be blessed with spiritual companionship?

First, let's consider what prevents spiritual companionship from forming. Amos tells us, "Do two men walk together unless they have made an agreement?" (Amos 3:3). God, in fact, desires companionship. He comes to walk with Adam in the cool of the day but finds him in hiding instead—sin had entered into man, and sin destroyed the "agreement," or oneness with God, therefore damaged companionship faster than anything else.

Our walking along side with God should never be tainted by sins. May the Lord keep our walk with Him pure and grant us a heart which is quick to repent and turn back to Him.

It is very important to note that the "agreement" spoken of by Amos does not refer to a doctrinal oneness that is derived by an arbitrary enforcement of certain theological teachings. Unfortunately, many Christian leaders and groups use this verse to legitimize their sectarian and divisive teachings and practices. To be able to fellowship together, they contend, Christians have to agree on vision, understanding of doctrines and interpretation of the Scriptures.... There have even been extreme cases where men's zeal to defend their theology or church affiliation caused misapplication of this wonderful verse and resulted in unfortunate divisions among God's people.

This type of mindset leads inevitably to the formation of elitist groups. Each group thinks highly of its leader and his teachings. Nonconformity to its leader and teachings are treated as outsiders, therefore inferior, and are shunned or despised.

Presently, as well as throughout Church history, many precious saints have been given wonderful revelations with regard to the way an authentic first-century church works. Regrettably though, much of the attention and emphasis have been focused on the outward form of doing church correctly. Again, making everyone "agree" on the way church should be done correctly becomes a foremost concern. Whether men have allowed the Lord to lay hold of them and instill His very essence and character into their beings become secondary considerations.

We need to ask ourselves, what good is the biblically correct way of doing church if we never learned to allow the Lord to deal with us and change our inner being into His likeness? What is the church anyway, is it the result of man's zeal and effort to do it correctly? Or is it Christ lived out and shared among believers?

Let's face it, even if the Lord created a perfect church model and plops us all smack dab in the middle of it, our human nature, religious concepts, and a multitude of self-related fleshly tendencies will always find ways to destroy each other and ruin the perfect church.

Lance Lambert once said half jokingly, "The church is perfect until you showed up." No truer words have been uttered! This generic "you" is the embodiment of all human nature with its various fleshly and religious tendencies. This un-dealt with flesh will always destroy the church, no matter how perfect it is!

The other day, a dear sister made a keen observation: A beautiful and

authentic Ming vase is highly sought after, but there are only a few authentic Ming vases – the rest of them are imitations (or worse, fakes). Why would Christians clamor and split hairs over trying to be an “Authentic First-Century Church”? There can only be one authentic first-century church, and it existed in the first century. The best efforts of men can only produce an “imitation” of the first century church (or a fake one)!

Is this worth all the fuss? Come on!

I was reminded of a story I heard about Billy and Ruth Graham being invited to a banquet in England. Many government officials were present. Ruth was seated next to an official in charge of catching crooks who made counterfeit money. Fascinated, Ruth asked, “Sir, you must spend all your time studying all those fake bills in order to be able to know the difference between the fake and the real thing.” “No, ma’am,” replied the official, “I spend all my time studying the real thing; that’s how I can instantly spot a fake one.”

Allow me to humbly submit: no one whose sole focus is on the church has ever found, nor will ever find, the authentic church. On the other hand, eyes fixed on Jesus who is the Author and Perfector of our faith will usher us into His church which is His body that expresses Him.

The “agreement” between brothers and sisters, whether doctrinal or experiential, can only be formed as we each focus on the Lord and maintain a close walk with Him. The more we walk with the Lord and allow Him to touch many aspects of our lives, the more we would come into this agreement, or oneness, with Him. This agreement with the Lord is grown organically. No amount of teaching, training and indoctrination will ever make us come into agreement with Him.

And growth is full of pain and perils. Each failure is used by the Lord to bring about repentance and surrender. Each bruise is tended to and bound up by the Lord to facilitate healing and renewing. As the cross deals with our self-life, yielding to it increases the resurrection fragrance of Christ’s life in us – “it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me” (Gal. 2:20).

A while back, a dear sister forwarded a poem she found on the Internet to the saints, and I was very impressed by it:

“Sometimes life seems hard to bear,
Full of sorrow, trouble and woe
It's then we have to remember
That it's in the valleys we grow.

If we always stayed on the mountain top
And never experienced pain,
We would never appreciate God's love
And would be living in vain.

We have so much to learn
And our growth is very slow,
Sometimes we need the mountain tops,
But it's in the valleys we grow.

We do not always understand
Why things happen as they do,
But I am very sure of one thing.

My Lord will see me through.

The little valleys are nothing
When we picture Christ on the cross
He went through the valley of death;
His victory was Satan's loss.

Forgive me Lord, for complaining
When I'm feeling so very low.
Just give me a gentle reminder
That it's in the valleys I grow.

Continue to strengthen me, Lord
And use my life each day
To share your love with others
And help them find their way.

Thank you for the valleys, Lord
For this one thing I know
The mountain tops are glorious
But it's in the valleys I grow!Â”

As each step we take in our journey with the Lord results in further step of
Â”agreementÂ” with Him, spontaneously, our Â”agreementÂ” with the saints will
become a true reality.

The Psalmist declares, Â”I am a companion of all those who fear Thee, and of
those who keep Thy preceptsÂ” (Ps. 119:63). Notice the intimacy of the
Psalmist here in this verse. He converses with the Lord face to face. Yet
he is not a Lone Ranger. He also has a close relationship with the saints Â–
he is a Â”companionÂ” with others. But his companionship is not the result of
horizontal friendship with others; it is the result of a vertical relationship with
the Lord Â– Â”fear Thee,Â” and Â”keep Thy precepts.Â”

LetÂ’s be very clear about this, unless our focus is the Lord and our
relationship is fresh with the Lord, there can be no Â”agreementÂ” between
two men, neither is Â”walking togetherÂ” possible. You can quote me on this.

Consider for a moment the two disciples walking together in complete agreement on the road to Emmaus. Their agree-
ment was based upon physical evidence that their Savior, Deliverer and Lord was crucified therefore all hope of salvation,
restoration and glory was dashed. Then came Jesus to walk along side of them. As their horizontal agreement with each
other began to turn and be aligned with Him, notice how quickly they shifted their journey in reverse!

Now their companionship is no longer based upon a horizontal agreement
with each other but on a vertical agreement with the risen Lord of lords and
King of kings. This, dear friends, must form the basis of all spiritual
companionship.

Many Christian leaders have pushed a horizontal agreement among their
followers, and there is no lack of zeal in their followers to spread this gospel
and make converts of this man-made Â”agreementÂ” and artificial Â”walking
together.Â” The sad outcome is a blanket of darkness descending over the
minds of innocent but undiscerning brothers and sisters who were misled
into believing they have been ushered into GodÂ’s ultimate purpose and
desires.

With such groups, usually walking in lock-steps with their leaders and with
each other is touted as Â”onenessÂ” and should be preserved at all cost.

Companionship is greatly prized, but it is a companionship missing the vertical link – the relationship and agreement with Christ.

So, we must come back to rediscovering our “vertical agreement” with our Head again. Learn to walk with Him in our daily lives. Learn to hearken to His still small voice. Learn to focus on Him. Learn to submit to His dealings.

As we learn to draw near to Him, we will discover the Lord gently placing around us sweet companions who understand us, appreciate us, forgive us for our faults, warts, abrasiveness and mistakes; and they are willing to walk with us and bear our burdens. There is nothing sweeter than this. It’s a genuine church life that we do not deserve and have not labored for.

Is it “First-Century”? Is it “authentic”? Is it planted by an “Apostle”?

Well...who cares...?

There is something in every normal human being to desire companionship. Meaningful and pleasant relationships with fellow-Christians who understand and appreciate friendship bring joy and healing to our lives. Loners, on the other hand, often resort to either doing harm to themselves or to others.

Still, there are others who hang out in parties and busily involve in activities or "ministries" but are unable to develop real companionship. Activities, ministries and group rituals can become facades to mask inward loneliness.

The only answer to these problems? Jesus.

Jesus was called “a friend of tax collectors and sinners” (Matt. 11:19). He fondly referred to Lazarus as “our friend” in John 11:11. He is ready and willing to be our Friend and to walk along side of us whether we are rotten sinners or lowly and ungifted “Lazaruses.”

So, shall we learn to “agree” with Him, and allow this vertical “agreement” to form the basis of our walking together in a precious and unpretentious church life?

Amen.

Oliver Peng
05/10/2007
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Re: Companionship - posted by MyVeryHeart (), on: 2010/10/7 0:39

Quote:
-----The only answer to these problems? Jesus.

Amen!

Re: Companionship - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2010/10/7 14:49

Quote:
-----This type of mindset leads inevitably to the formation of elitist groups. Each group thinks highly of its leader and his teachings. Nonconformity to its leader and teachings are treated as outsiders, therefore inferior, and are shunned or despised.

I have a question: is this not what you are doing to people who disagree with you?

Re: , on: 2010/10/7 15:19

Do you have a specific situation in mind?

Re: - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2010/10/7 22:13

Amen. Good word. The source of our unity is not our doctrinal uniformity, but rather, our mutual relationship to Christ. If Christ can live in you and minister through you, and if Christ can live in me and minister in me, then we can fellowship together and labor together, even if we aren't carbon copies of one another.

Re: Companionship by Oliver Peng - posted by NewCovWinDor (), on: 2010/10/7 22:27

Wow. That's powerful.

Let us all take heed to this, whether members of "denominational" churches, "nondenominational" churches, "home" churches or otherwise.

Paul determined to know nothing but "Jesus Christ, and Him crucified." How many of our problems would be resolved if we TRULY put Jesus first?

Amen. Thanks for sharing that article!

Re: - posted by ginnyrose (), on: 2010/10/8 12:24

Quote:
-----Do you have a specific situation in mind?

Yes.

There has been a lot of bashing of church structure on SI recently. If you happen to have a pastor, you are part of the institutionalized church that is operated like a business, never once giving consideration that not all churches are run like a dictatorship.

Yet, when a church works to maintain the purity, holiness of their brotherhood and discipline is practiced by the excommunication of an unrepentant member, it is called a dictatorship by those on the outside looking in. Some will say doctrine is not THAT important - love for Jesus is. But what did we just see here on SI? A poster was banned because he spouted Catholic doctrine! He declared that he loved Jesus, so why was he banned?

In the book of Acts you read a lot about how elders were ordained in the communities after people came to the LORD. Later in Timothy you read about the office of the bishop.

There must be structure because people left without human leadership will wander off. Left without leadership people will become independent, all thinking they have the Spirit of the LORD.

Spiritual leadership will not alone guarantee protection from apostasy. However, people left without it will fall into it much quicker.

Companionship is essential for any group of people who are serving the LORD. It is the glue that holds any group together.

er. When an independent spirit pervades any group you will find it soon unraveling and brotherhood is lost.

Pilgrim, I agree with the essence of your article...but having seen so many pieces posted recently on SI lambasting church structure, I am wary of any philosophical reasoning that would work to destroy what the scriptures plainly teach - and what was practiced by the apostles.

This is my point....or, am I straining at a gnat and swallowing a camel?

ginnyrose

Re: - posted by sojourner7 (), on: 2010/10/8 13:26

The companionship of the LORD is
with those who honor and serve HIM.
And there's no Friend like the
lowly JESUS, no not One, no not One!!

Re: , on: 2010/10/8 17:49

Quote:
-----There must be structure because people left without human leadership will wander off. Left without leadership people will become independent, all thinking they have the Spirit of the LORD. Spiritual leadership will not alone guarantee protection from apostasy. However, people left without it will fall into it much quicker.

Spiritual Leadership without Spiritual Reality is hollow and empty. Jesus Christ is more than capable of being your leader and keeping you safe. He is and wants to be your All in All. Submit to His Spirit and His Word and He will lead you by still waters and green pastures. What the Lord wants to do in your heart, no man can accomplish, not even you.

Lack of structure or human leadership does not cause people to wander off, lack of Christ does. If you have Christ you are not independent but solely and completely dependent on Him.

I have posted a new article that might help a little more, called, "Simply Stated".

It treats all "structures" in the same way.

Turn to Him with all your heart and do not be joined to anything else in your heart but Him.

Re: - posted by NewCovWinDor (), on: 2010/10/8 20:27

Amen, amen, amen ginnyrose!

So often we forget that the Church is His body... and yet we freely rebel against her and her servants!

This article was great for its emphasis on Jesus first. If we take the middle road of what the author says, it is very good. We must put Christ ahead of places, people and programs. But let us beware of using these encouragements as license to run against God's ministers.

So often we clothe our rebellion in such spiritual terms... when really the problem is our own proud hearts. I am so grieved by what appears to be merely a baptized form of the hippie movement in this our day. Tremendous rebellion is being exercised under the guise of "Freedom of Conscience".

The Holy Writ is full of instructions to deacons, bishops, pastors, etc. It is wrong to say there should be no "structure", for the Lord has spent many precious verses to say how it should operate! Structure has been abused before, but so have many other gifts, ordinances and commands. Let us not "throw the baby out with the bathwater".

If your church leaders are truly sold out to the Lord (thankfully, mine both are), then we can and should trust and submit to them, for they watch for our souls. Where is our trust in God? Can I not trust Him to work through my pastor(s)? If a man has laid aside much for the service of Jesus, can I not listen to him and heed his instruction?

If your pastor is not following the Word, then I can see where that could be a serious problem. In such a case, there is a place for leaving. But, oh, brethren, let us carefully examine our hearts before we invoke the "obey God rather than men" maxim. Too often it is used to excuse that which is rebellious.

I have tried going the rebellious route in years past... trying to strike out on my own and just being "Jesus and I." It ended up just being "I" all along. Trust me, it will end in destruction. I have seen it happen.

Even worse, the second generation will take their parents' rebellion against the "church establishment", and will often go further down the road of rebellion into bucking the "moral establishment". Mark this, friends. I have personally seen this happen many, many times to precious friends and acquaintances. They refuse to submit to godly authority, and then are surprised when their children then rebel against them. "More is caught than taught," as they say.

Brothers and sisters, we need each other. Let us never be so lifted up in ourselves that we think we are self-sufficient.

I need ALL of you, for we are one in the Body of Christ.

Thanks again, ginnyrose.

Re: , on: 2010/10/8 20:54

But the Lord does have structure just as an earthly family does, so does God's family. Mature leaders that did not take a shortcut to "leadership" and are servants that are not lording over God's flock. They provide oversight because they have come through God's process of maturation and have submitted to the Lord's dealings in their lives. We have all been taught that they are prominent in a gathering rather than taking the place of one that oversees and allows the Church to function. The opposite is sadly true, whereas they are prominent and the Church is not functioning.

The key is discerning what is of God and what is of man rather than make blanket characterizations. Almost two thousand years ago the Lord Jesus made this great declaration, "I will build My church." Down through the ages He has been building. Unfortunately, man has been building also. And the work of man is ALWAYS detrimental to the work of God -- even when it is done in His name.

The Lord will not lead you to rebel against Himself. He will lead you away from anything that is not of Him. We need discernment for this and just cannot blindly call everything that operates in His name as HIM.

We must discern what is labeled "Godly authority". Lord help us to see you and to understand your ways.

Re: - posted by NewCovWinDor (), on: 2010/10/8 21:34

An excellent synopsis of what I wanted to say, but was not eloquent enough.

Discerning submission... the crying need of the hour!

Thanks!

Re: , on: 2010/10/8 21:47

Continuing on regarding the discerning of leaders and discerning God's work.

Let me illustrate:

Does God select great men of God to do His work on earth?

Or does He just use everyday people? Maybe we should ask what makes a man a "great man of God".

MOSES:

In the natural realm, Moses was great in every sense of the word for much of his first 40 years. He was raised and educated in Pharaoh's courts, empowered with military command, trusted with planning and building, gifted with oratorical skill, and he was consumed with a burning zeal to serve God. The religious world would fall head over heels to make a man of this caliber their great leader.

But not God...

God not only rejected Moses as a spiritual leader, He deemed him as being totally unsuitable – except for being a sheep-herder in the back side of the desert – for the next 40 years of his life. God cannot use any of Moses' greatness until every last drop of it got drained into the sand.

When a royal vessel is reduced to a common vessel – humbled and abased, and barely articulate – then will God have secured His vessel of honor, way past his prime and not a minute sooner, I might add.

Credit to Oliver Peng for this bit on Moses.

Or how about what happened on the plains of Shinar?

A long time ago there were some people who were wanderers on the earth. They had a dream and a vision to find a place and establish themselves as a people who worshipped God and who experienced unity amongst themselves. So, they found a beautiful land and with much hard work and self-sacrifice they began to realize their dream as it unfolded day by day.

It would be hard to deny that these people did not know something of the heart and purpose of God. In the last book of the Bible we see that God is ultimately after a city. Abraham knew this and he spent his life searching for that city.

By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise: For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God. Heb 11:8-11

I think it would be difficult to fault these people whose motives seemed so noble. However, they had one shortcoming. God had neither commanded nor requested them to build a city for Himself. Therefore, it is not surprising that when these people built, they built with man-made bricks instead of God-made stone. When God, the MasterBuilder wants something built, He equips and instructs His people as to how He builds. His methods and His materials. Man's work always looks like man and is detestable in the sight of God. "...for that which is highly esteemed among men is abomination in the sight of God." Luke 16:15b

God eventually stopped the construction of the "holy" city on the plain of Shinar. The place later became known as Babel. Most people forget that it did not start out as Babel. It began as a city with a tower that would reach into the heavens - to God. It is easy to sit back and judge them as a people with some evil imagination in their hearts. After all, when people think of Babel they usually think of the worst when it comes to the people that were involved. Pagan, evil, sinister, etc. The fact is, they were people like you and me with ideas, plans and designs for doing something for God. Isn't it amazing that almost every church building today has a tower reaching to the heavens.

Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it: Psalm 127:1a