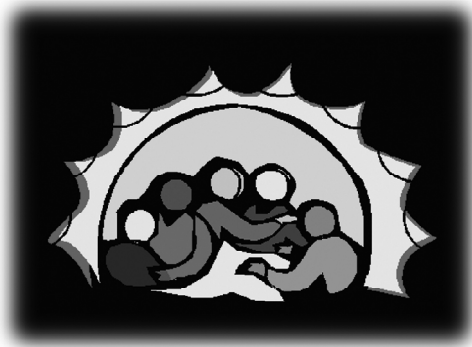


6



CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP





How not to Fellowship

1

Do not disregard the indispensability of fellowship.

2

Do not be overruled by self-interests.

3

Do not be hypocritical in love.

4

Do not postpone reconciliation.

5

Do not be partial.

6

Do not write off anyone quickly.

7

Do not give place to envy.

8

Do not expect too much from others.

9

Do not lose the spirit of friendship.

10

Do not limit your circle of fellowship.



How not to Fellowship

Introduction

- Why “How NOT TO Fellowship” instead of “How TO Fellowship?”

The famous love chapter in the Bible lists out 14 manifestations of love —

1 Cor 13:4-7

8 out of 14 say what love does NOT do!

In the other NT Epistles also, while writing about Christian Fellowship, the Apostles often pointed out what we must NOT do!

Because our Christian Churches and Communities are largely fractured and fragmented, we look at things we must **unlearn**.

In most of our fellowships there’s no fellowship!

- In this subject we must consider two Greek words —
 - a) *Ecclesia* = a “called out” assembly
i.e. men and women called out from the world to form a “family”—

2 Cor 6:17,18 ... *come out ... sons ... daughters ...*
These come-outers form what’s called “fellowship.”
That is —
 - b) *Koinonia*
The first occurrence: Acts 2:42
i.e. those who responded to the message in v40,
“Be saved from this crooked generation”
Koinonia = sharing in common, or communion

■ Fellowship has two dimensions —

- a) Fellowship with God
- b) Fellowship with one another

Brought together in 1 Jn 1:3

... fellowship with us ... with the Father ... Son ...

i.e. Fellowship with God is the **basis** of
our fellowship with one another.

Relationship with God, though definite, is abstract;
relationship with one another is tangible, hence difficult!
It's a challenge.

Both are interrelated —

1 Jn 3:14 ... *eternal life ... when we love brothers*

1 Jn 5:2 ... *love God's children ... love God*

- Apostle Paul gave so many instructions to Timothy
about Christian ministry;
one important aspect was —

*"How to behave in the **House** of God"* (1 Tim 3:14, 15)

- Absolute necessity of loving one another —

Rom 13:10b ... *love ... fulfillment of Law*

1 Tim 1:5a ... *love ... end of the Law*

1 Jn 4:12 ... *no one has seen God ... love one another*

- In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus dealt more with
Relationships than any other subject (Mt 5-7) —

30 verses ... Relationships

21 verses ... Righteousness

18 verses ... Money

17 verses ... Prayer & Spiritual Disciplines

How not to Fellowship

1. Do not disregard the indispensability of fellowship.

■ Love God AND love man!

Mt 22:36-40 ... *love your God ... love your neighbour*

“Equal” importance

Love “man” (a) Believers

(b) Unbelievers

(a) Children of God

(b) Those who have not become the children of God yet

In this Series, we deal with —

Relationship with the children of God

The emphasis in the Scriptures —

Gal 6:10 ... *especially to the household of faith*

1 Pet 2:17 ... *Honour all ... love brotherhood*

i.e. “Friendship” with anyone;

but “Fellowship” with God’s people only.

■ We talk so much about faith,

but very little about **love**.

But these two are treated alike in the Scriptures —

Gal 5:6 ... *Faith thro’ love*

Eph 1:16 ... *Faith and love*

3:17 ... *Faith and love*

6:23 ... *Love with faith*

Col 1:4 ... *Faith and love*

1 Thess 5:8 ... *Faith and love*

1 Tim 1:14 ... *Faith and love*

Philemon 5 ... *Faith and love*

To grow in **both**: 2 Thess 1:3 ... *faith grows ... love abounds*

Neglect of “love” leaves us in —

- a) darkness (1 Jn 2:9-11)
- b) death (1 Jn 3:14b)

This is the “earliest” and the “oldest” message —

1 Jn 3:11 ... *from the beginning ... love ...*

- So many “one another” passages in the NT —
 - *Forgive one another* (Col 3:13)
 - *Honour one another* (Rom 12:10)
 - *Accept one another* (Rom 15:7)
 - *Be of the same mind with one another* (Rom 12:16)
 - *Admonish one another* (Rom 15:14)
 - *Greet one another* (Rom 16:16)
 - *Serve one another* (1 Pet 4:10)
 - *Bear one another's burden* (Gal 6:2)
 - *Forbear one another* (Eph 4:2)
 - *Submit to one another* (Eph 5:21)
 - *Exhort one another* (Heb 3:13)
 - *Encourage one another* (1 Thess 5:11)
 - *Edify one another* (Rom 14:19)
 - *Pray for one another* (Js 5:16)
 - *Wait for one another* (1 Cor 11:33)

- Fellowship

= A close mutual relationship

The closeness is indicated by another word: “bond” —

Eph 4:3 ... *bond of peace*

Col 3:14 ... *bond of perfection*

The world is becoming more and more “impersonal” —

What a challenge for us to grow in fellowship!

- Any relationship with God's people has to reflect this aroma of "fellowship" —

eg) *Fellow disciples* (Jn 11:16) — same Master
Fellow heirs (Eph 3:6) — same Saviour (salvation)
Fellow soldier (Phil 2:25) — same enemy
Fellow worker (Col 4:11) — same task
Fellow servant (Rev 22:9) — same God
Fellow labourer (1 Thess 3:2) — same field
Fellow elder (1 Pet 5:1) — same Church
Fellow prisoner (Rom 16:7) — same suffering
Fellow citizens (Eph 2:19) — same Heaven!

- The word-pictures given to present the people of God speak of "togetherness" and "closeness" —

- Building (Eph 2:19-22)
— *"built" together ... "joined" together*
- Family (1 Tim 5:1,2)
— *father ... mother ... brothers ... sisters ...*
- Flock (Jn 10:16)
— *not goats ... but sheep ... go together!*

The best picture —

- *Body* (1 Cor 12:27)
- *Knitwear* (Col 2:2,19) Threads woven together!

- Revival & Restoration today —

Worship restored, not fellowship:

Eph 5:19,20 ... *speaking to one another ...*
singing ... submitting
Col 3:16,17 ... *teaching ... admonishing ... singing*
Zeph 3:9 ... *pure language ... worship ... one accord*

The Word "*Hallelujah*" is actually a call to "**others**" to
"*Praise the Lord!*" (Psa 113:1;115:18;117;148:1;149:1;150:1,6)

■ We avoid fellowship because we want to avoid problems —

We are looking for a **perfect** Church —
Often we speak about the “early” Church;
but that was not without problems and conflicts.

- Greeks against Hebrews
Acts 6 ... even though they were so united immediately
after Pentecost in money matters.
- Paul rebukes Peter publicly for his prejudice
against Gentile believers (Gal 2)
- Paul & some Judean brothers on the issue of circumcision
(Acts 15)
- Paul & Barnabas separate over John Mark
(Acts 15)
- Four factions in the Corinthian Church
1 Cor 1 ... *Paul/Apollos/Cephas/Christ*
- Factions over eating of meat and observance of days
(Rom 14)
- Two women in the Philippian Church
(Phil 4)
Are there not problems in our families?
Do we immediately avoid or withdraw?

Someone said,

Fellowship = An imperfect child of God
relating to the other imperfect children of God

- If we neglect the fellowship of God’s people,
the loss and disadvantages are ours —
 - Heb 10:25,26 ... *Willful sinning*
 - Eccl 4:9-12 ... Cooling off spiritually
 - Eph 3:18 ... Growth & understanding of God’s ways stunted

- God loves the fellowship of His people so much that He has kept a Book of Remembrance exclusively for that —

Mal 3:16 ... *those who fear the Lord speak to one another*

- How long will we need this fellowship?

Until Christ's Return (1 Thess 3:12,13)

Beyond His Return also (Rev 19:7,8)

The bride ... the saints

He is not returning for individuals,
but for the whole Church!

How not to Fellowship

2. Do not be overruled by self-interests.

- The first sign of the last days —

2 Tim 3:1,2 ... *perilous times ... lovers of themselves*

The very next sign: “*lovers of money*”

— love of self and love of money are twin sisters.

That’s why,

the first outcome of the Holy Spirit’s outpouring —

Acts 2:44,45 ... *sold possessions ... distributed ...*

4:34,35 ... *sold lands ... houses ... distributed ...*

This is the challenge Apostle John throws up —

1 Jn 3:17 ... *world’s goods ... shuts up heart ... love?*

As long as we have not opened up our “treasury”

to the needy brothers and sisters,

we have not opened our “hearts” to them —

Mt 6:21 ... *where your treasure ... your heart*

We are good in listening to sermons on “love,”

but not ready to practise it, because of “self-interest”—

Ezek 33:31 ... *mouth ... love ... hearts ... gain*

Prophet Isaiah condemned a religion which was wrapped up in self-interest” —

Isa 58:6,7 ... *fasting ... hiding from own flesh*

This was the consistent teaching of Jesus —

Jn 15:13 ... *No greater love than to give one’s **life***

Life = Time + Talent + Treasure

Apostle John explains this practically —

1 Jn 3:16,17 ... *love ... goods ...*

We talk so much about **Jn 3:16** ... *God so loved ... gave*

How about **1 Jn 3:16?** ... *lay lives for brothers*

We have so many walltexts on —

Rom 12:12c ... *“continue steadfastly in prayer”*

How about v13a? ... *“distributing to the needs of saints”*

- Not only in the matter of material things,
there are also other areas where we must rise
above self-interests —

- Burdens and problems of people

Two types of burdens —

- a) What you can bear (Gal 6:5)

Routine duties, hardships, difficulties.

We must learn to handle them

by ourselves by prayer and discipline.

- b) What you cannot bear (Gal 6:2)

Unusual situations

Sudden calamities

Unexpected losses, etc.

- eg) Affliction of Joseph our brother —

Am 6:1,4,6 ... *Woe ... Zion ... ease ...*

- eg) Jesus refers to such critical situations —

Mt 25:42-44

— No food, no drink

— Desertedness

— Clothelessness/i.e. no basic necessities

— Sickness

— Imprisonment

These left-siders were too busy to find time
for the people in dire need.

We say, "I have my own problems;
where's time to think about others?"

— Away with the attitude:

"Let me mind my business!"

Do not be indifferent to the sufferings of others —

Rom 12:15 ... *"Weep with those who weep"*

— The secret is:

When we identify with the sufferings of others,

we also will be comforted ... 2 Cor 1:6,7

— Apostle Paul mourns the scarcity of preachers & leaders
without self-interest ...

Phil 2:20,21 ... *Timothy ... all seek their own ...*

□ Another area where we must rise above self-interests
is in respecting the convictions and views of others —

Rom 15:1-3 ... *strong ... weak ... please ourselves*

eg) Food habits

1 Cor 10:23,24 ... *lawful but not helpful ...*

8:13 ... *never meat again !!!*

eg) Discussions and arguments

Phil 2:3,4... *respect the opinions of others*

eg) Hymns or Choruses? Organ or Guitar?

Psa 46:10 ... *Be still and know*

47:1 ... *Shout to God*

eg) Preference and Promotion

Mt 20:20,21,24 ... *Sons of Zebedee* ...

Self-interest disrupts unity!

■ **Conclusion**

Away with the spirit of the age:

What will “I” get out of it?

Rather,

What can I do to “others?”

Beware of utilitarian relationships in the Body of Christ.

How not to Fellowship

3. Do not be hypocritical in love.

- Hypocrisy = pretension

Greek: Hypocrite = Actor

i.e. lack of sincerity and genuineness

Jesus rebuked people for so many sins;

but only for the sin of “hypocrisy” He pronounced “woes!”

He never said, Woe unto you, murderers!

or, Woe unto you, thieves!

or, Woe unto you, adulterers!

but He said, “*Woe unto you, hypocrites!*”

eg) Mt 23 ... How many woes!

- The worst form of hypocrisy is

hypocrisy in “relationships” —

That’s why Rom 12:9a ... “*love without hypocrisy*”

Apostle Paul amplified it while writing to Timothy: 1 Tim 1:5

a) “*pure heart*” — Faithful to God

b) “*good conscience*” — Faithful to men

c) “*sincere faith*” — Faithful to the Scriptures

- Fellowship is not possible

without true, sincere, genuine love —

□ 1 Jn 1:7 ... *If we walk in the light ... fellowship*

□ 2 Ki 10:15,16 ... *King Jehu to Jehonadab:*

“If your heart is right ... then give your hand”

Handshakes, hugs, kisses are all meaningless

without a “right heart.”

- A classic example for genuine fellowship —
David & Jonathan (1 Sam 18:3,4)
“robe ... armour ... even sword ...”
What a trust! (Total disarmament!)

Jonathan: “I know that David will not backstab me!”
Jonathan knew that David was a man of good conscience —
eg) 1 Sam 24:4-7

David cut off the corner of Saul’s robe
when the latter had gone out on personal needs.
But David’s “heart” troubled him ...
... “the Lord’s anointed ...”

Every Christian is anointed of God.

■ **How does hypocrisy manifest in fellowships?**

- a) Flattery (David experienced so much of this)
Psa 12:1,2 ... *double heart* ...
28:3 ... *speak peace ... evil heart* ...
55:21 ... *butter-smooth ... razor-sharp*
62:4b ... *bless ... curse inwardly*

- b) Talebearing/Scandalising/Gossiping
Prov 16:27,28 ... *whisperer separates best of friends*
17:9 ... *repeats a matter separates best friends*

He will **act** as if he is sharing the information for prayer,
out of concern!

Responsible not only for “information” but also “impression!”

Listening to talebearers is as wicked as talebearing —
— “fire” vs. “wood” Prov 16:27 vs. 26:20
— the listener is a *liar + evil doer* (Prov 17:4)

i.e. Give a negative response by asking 3 questions:

- Will it benefit him?
- Will it benefit you?
- Will it glorify God?

i.e. Pour cold water on what the talebearer says!

c) Fault-finding

- “*beam*” vs. “*speck*” ... Mt 7:5
- Hard on others but lenient towards themselves
Rom 2:1 ... *WHOEVER* ... *WHATEVER* ...

Hypocrites inflate their ego by only expecting
and manipulating others to confess to them —
but, Js 5:16 ... “*confess to one another*”

In the name of correcting a person,
hypocrites will destroy him —

Gal 6:1 ... *restore* ... *gentle* ...

On the other hand,

Jesus “corrected” as well as “restored”
the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8:1-11)

“I don’t condemn you ... Sin no more!”

Hypocrites are known for —

d) Deserting in crisis

— True fellowship means partaking in suffering also.

2 Cor 1:7

An excellent example

David tells Abiathar: 1 Sam 22:23

“With me you shall be safe!”

— The three friends of Job perhaps were not good enough
as counsellors; but they were excellent companions
and comrades —

Job 2:11-13 ... Simply sat with Job without speaking
a single word for 7 days & 7 nights!

All these 3 friends spoke against hypocrisy —

Bildad (Job 8:13) *“Hope of hypocrite shall perish”*

Elipaz (Job 15:34) *“hypocrites will be barren”*

Zophar (Job 20:5) *“joy of hypocrites for a moment”*

Even the 4th friend, who joined later,
spoke against hypocrisy—

Elihu (Job 34:30) *“hypocrites a snare to people”*

Yes, *“a brother is born for adversity!”* (Prov 17:17)

— God rebuked Esau for his indifference towards Jacob
at the time of distress

Obad 10-14 ... *You should not have ...* (thrice)

e) Love in word, not in deed

1 Jn 3:18 ... *let us ... not in word ...*

The very next verse speaks of sincerity in heart (v19)

Hypocrites will withdraw the moment you talk about
sharing material goods!

The first sin of hypocrisy that was judged in the early Church
was in the matter of “money” withheld from sharing with the
poor and the needy —

Ananias & Sapphira (Acts 5:1-10)

How not to Fellowship

4. Do not postpone reconciliation.

- The Gospel is a Message of reconciliation.

This is symbolised by the Cross —

+	Vertical: with God	Eph 2:13,14,18
	Horizontal: with man	

This was pointed out in the Christmas message itself —

Lk 2:13,14 ... *Glory to God ... goodwill towards men*

Unfortunately we have stopped with the first dimension.

Two sides of the same coin —

Being right with God;

Being right with man.

One is not complete without the other —

1 Jn 4:20 ... *liar ... how can he ..?*

In the same way,

if a man's ways please the Lord ... Prov 16:7

One leads to the other.

- Getting right with man is a priority to live a life acceptable to God —

Mt 5:23,24 ... *altar ... FIRST reconcile ...*

Do not **postpone** reconciliation!

In this instance,

You are the offender;

your brother is the offended!

Here, **you** must take the initiative.

Suppose, you are the offended ...

Mt 18:15 ... Here also, **you** must take the initiative.

■ Why is reconciliation so important?

□ The very name of our God —

“God of **Peace**” Rom 16:20

1 Cor 14:33

1 Thess 5:23

2 Thess 3:16

Heb 13:20

□ The very first lesson after teaching the Model Prayer —

Mt 6:14,15 ... *If you forgive ...*

□ The very first saying from the Cross —

“Father, forgive them ...” (Lk 23:34)

□ Offending a brother is a **serious** matter —

eg) Mt 5:21,22 ... the very first mention of “hell”

— until then about Heaven! (vv 12,19,20)

□ A clear **conscience** is a must for walking right with God—

1 Jn 3:18-21 ... *love ... conscience ...*

Examples throughout the Bible —

1 Sam 2:26 ... Boy Samuel ... *God and man*

Lk 2:52 ... Boy Jesus ... *God and man*

Acts 24:16 ... Apostle Paul ... *God and man*

■ Reconciliation is not only important,

it must also be done as **immediately** as possible —

Heb 12:14,15 ... *root ... bitterness ... “many” defiled*

The bitterness between two individuals affects

“several” others also.

— That’s why the Bible admonishes us to shed down anger as quickly as possible ...

Eph 4:26,27 ... *angry ... sin ... sin go down ...*
— foothold for the devil

This is a quote from the OT —

Psa 4:4 ... *angry ... sin ... quieten at bed!*
Anger becomes bitterness if it stays long.
A-N-G-E-R is just one letter short of D-A-N-G-E-R!

- The greatest example against prolonged anger is GOD Himself! —

Psa 30:5a ... *anger ... but for a moment ... life*

But in our case,
the love is for a “moment,”
but bitterness is for “life!”

God’s logic: Gen 6:3 ... *strive not always ... just flesh*
That’s why, repeatedly we are called to forgive others —
“AS Christ/God has forgiven” us!
Eph 4:32 ... *as God in Christ ...*
anger (v26) ►► bitterness (v31) ►► forgive (v32)

Col 3:13 ... *as Christ ...*
— even if there’s a genuine “*complaint*”

A severe illustration by Jesus — Mt 18:23-34
Master to first servant (10,000 talents)
First servant to second servant (100 denarii)
10,000 talents = wages for 20 years
100 denarii = wages for 20 weeks

Unforgiveness among men is ungratefulness towards God!
What God expects from us in the matter of forgiveness
is **nothing** compared to what He has done to us!

This is the GREATEST and MOST POWERFUL
motivator for forgiveness.

- Two things make forgiveness easy —
 - Remember (a) How much God has forgiven us!
 - (b) God has forgiven the other person!
 - eg) Prodigal son — It was the “father’s” property he wasted,
not his “brother’s” property!
The **father** forgave him;
why should not the **brother** forgive him?
 - When reconciliation is not easy —
What should you do?
 - a) Ask God to pour out His love into your heart.
 - b) Don’t stop with prayer —
 - Move** on in the direction of reconciliation
 - eg) Lk 17:4-6 ... *7 times forgive ... increase faith ...*
mustard seed ... mulberry tree
 - eg) Jacob
He was afraid of Esau;
but he took the initiative — Gen 32
At the end of Gen 32, Peniel experience!
Gen 33 ... He met Esau and they were reconciled!
God honours the steps taken for reconciliation.
- After doing **all you can** (Rom 12:18),
leave the matter in the hands of God —
i.e. Keep praying for that person.

(See also Pages 38-39, 98-100, 255-258, 751-754)

How not to Fellowship

5. Do not be partial.

- The other word for “partiality” — “prejudice”
i.e. preferring one and despising the other
for no legitimate or valid reason
 - Partiality is a gross sin
Js 2:8,9 ... *partiality ... sin ...*
As serious as “*adultery*” or “*murder*” (vv10,11)
 - We all have an equal standing before God:
Brothers and sisters, not cousins or nephews!
Gal 3:26 ... *All sons!*
Rom 8:29 ... *Jesus our Elder Brother ...*
We are all brothers ...
Heb 2:11 ... *Not ashamed to call us His brothers!*
- **Areas of Partiality**
 - a) Rich vs. Poor
Js 2:1-4 ... *In the Assembly ... rich ... poor ...*
Favoritism and faith in Christ do not go together (v1)
The Gift of Salvation our brothers possess is
greater than all our wealth — Psa 49:6-8
 - Despising of poor even in the Lord’s Supper —
1 Cor 11:22,33,34 ... *despise poor ... wait for one another...*
 - This was actually a backsliding —
Acts 2:44-46 ... *To start with, simplicity of heart ... food*
 - A warning —
Prov 17:5a ... *He who mocks the poor ... Creator*

b) Racism/Casteism

The Jews always despised other communities.

— especially no dealings with Samaritans,
even though they were half-Jews!

But Jesus wantonly appreciated the Samaritans —

□ Good Samaritan (Lk 10:30-37)

□ 1 of the 10 lepers (Lk 17:15-17)

OT examples: Lk 4:25-27

□ Elijah — To a widow of Sidon
(though so many widows in Israel)

□ Elisha — Leper Naaman from Syria
(though so many lepers in Israel)

Whereas, the disciples wanted to bring fire
on a “Samaritan” village, quoting Elijah! Lk 9:51-55
Jerusalem vs. Samaria (Regionalism) (v51)

Paul’s challenge:

“Are we better than they?”

Rom 3:9 ... *“NOT AT ALL!”*

c) Nepotism

The attitude of Jesus —

Mk 3:31-35 ... *Who is My brother, mother ...?*

This comes as a clear teaching from Paul —

2 Cor 5:16,17 ... *no more according to flesh*

“Not even Christ” = Not according to our Jewishness!

“Old things”—racism, casteism, regionalism, all *passed away*.

- This is the message to be thundered in every Church!
There's partiality —
 - (i) in sharing the blessings
 - Acts 6:1 ... Hellenists vs. Hebrews
 - Even though they were also Jews,
but spoke Greek! (two language groups)
 - (ii) in selecting the leaders
 - 1 Tim 5:21,22 ...
 - They set up kings, but not by Me ...* Hos 8:4a
 - God does not approve such elections.
 - Such leaders ill-treat ordinary people —
 - Eph 6:9 ... *not knowing there's no partiality with God!*
- One reason why we give preference to some
but despise others —
 - We think too much of ourselves —
 - Rom 12:16 ... *highminded ... humble ...*
 - eg) We think the congregations of the elite & educated
are greater than those of ordinary people.
 - We forget, whatever we have more than others
is what we have received from God —
 - 1 Cor 4:7 ... *Who makes you to differ?*
wiser ... fairer ... stronger ... richer ...
 - We fail to develop an attitude like Paul —
 - Rom 7:18 ... *"I see nothing good in me!"*
 - We don't realise, Heaven will be populated
by less-than-average people!
1 Cor 1:26-29 ... *See your calling ...*
not many wise... mighty... noble ...

- If this message is thundered in our Churches,
there will be another mighty outpouring of the Holy Spirit —
 - Acts 10:28 ... *“Call no man common”*
 - :34 ... *“God is no respecter of persons”*
 - :44 ... *“While Peter was still speaking,*
the Holy Spirit fell ...”

- A hymn by G.W. Briggs (1875-1959):
 - In Christ all races meet,*
 - Their ancient feuds forgetting,*
 - The whole round world complete,*
 - From sunrise to its setting:*
 - When Christ is throned as Lord,*
 - Men shall forsake their fear,*
 - To ploughshare beat the sword,*
 - To pruning-hook the spear.*

(See also Pages 634-637)

How not to Fellowship

6. Do not write off anyone quickly.

- Because there's so much of bad in the best of us,
and so much of good in the worst of us,
we are not to write off anyone quickly!

We are all known for judging others quickly.

What does the Bible say about judging others?

- Strictly speaking, we are not to judge at all!

Jesus: Mt 7:1 ... *Judge not ...*

Reason: The same judgment to us! (v2)

Usually we ignore our fault

but magnify that of others —

speck vs. plank (v3)

Paul: Rom 2:1 ... *judge another ... condemn ... yourself*

Reason: The same fault in us!

eg) Jesus and the woman caught in adultery (Jn 8).

- Even if we are to decide about a person,
do not judge *according to appearance* (Jn 7:24)

An eternal truth:

1 Sam 16:7b ... *Lord ... heart ... man ... face*

In the strict sense,

we never know everything about a person —

There's always another side —

Prov 18:17 ... *the first one ... until his neighbour*

That's why —

“Be swift to hear but slow to speak and anger” (Js 1:19,20)

wrath of man vs. righteousness of God

In general, it's best to wait for the Day of Judgment —

1 Cor 4:5 ... II Coming ... *praise from God for each man*

- A classic example of consideration against quick judgment—

Jonah and the mariners:

Jon 1:7 ... Lot on Jonah
:8 ... Considerate questions
:11 ... *What shall we do?*
:12 ... Throw me out!
:13 ... *Nevertheless rowed hard*
:14 ... *Prayed*
:15 ... Threw him out
:16 ... *Yet feared and offered sacrifice*

- Another classic example, in the NT —

Joseph & Mary:

Mt 1:19...As per Law, he could have arranged to stone her;
but God spoke to him when he patiently was considering
it with kindness!

- Similarly, Job's friends did not speak or pass on any words
of judgment for 7 full days — (Job 2:13)

Our problem is we assume too many things, too quickly!

- Another reason why we write off people quickly is
that we conclude —

they are **too difficult** to live with!

The Bible abounds with examples of how God puts difficult
and diametrically opposite people together —

Purpose: *Iron sharpens iron!* (Prov 27:17)

- Hagar with Sarai

Gen 16:8,9 ... *wait ... submit*

- Jacob with Laban
 - Jacob = deceiver
 - Laban = “white” = deception
 - Master of deception
 - (Even in the matter of giving the Bride, Rachel vs. Leah!)
- Matthew & Simon (Lk 6:15)
 - Matthew: Tax-collector for Roman government
 - Simon: Belonging to the Zealot party
 - working to overthrow Roman Rule!
- Mary & Martha (Lk 10:41,42)
 - Lover of meditation vs. Lover of domestic affairs
- Euodia & Synteché (Phil 4:2)
 - Euodia = fragrance
 - Synteché = fortune
 - i.e. artistic vs. materialistic
 - Call: *To be of the same mind IN THE LORD!*
- Heaven will be a place of surprises!
 - Lk 13:28-30 ... *first ... last ... last ... first*
- Some positive counsel:
 - a) Even if someone fails repeatedly, don't hate him;
 - because, *“love covers a multitude of sins”*
 - OT: Prov 10:12 ... *“all” sins*
 - NT: 1 Pet 4:8 ... *“multitude” of sins*
 - Our love should not be a “because-of” love,
 - but an “in-spite-of” love!
 - eg) *While we were “yet” sinners, Christ died for us!* (Rom 5:8)
 - How can I denounce (write off) whom God has not?
 - (Num 23:8b)

b) Do not look at people as to what they are;
but what they can become!

eg) Paul wrote off Mark too quickly because of one failure
(Acts 15:38)

But Barnabas looked at Mark
as to what he could become (v37)

Result: Restored to the main team (2 Tim 4:11)
When all but Luke left Paul !!!

Keep praying: "Lord, change ME!"

■ An illustration:

A quarrel at a Carpenter shop—

Hammer : noisy
Chisel : sharp
Footrule : critical
Screwdriver : interfering
Plane : shallow

A Cross was made with all these tools
and the Carpenter died on it!

How not to Fellowship

7. Do not give place to envy.

- There are so many vices which are detrimental to healthy Christian fellowship; but envy is perhaps the foremost of all —
 - Spiritual gifts dealt with in 1 Cor 12,13 & 14
Emphasis: Gifts without love useless (Ch 13)
Ch 13: What love does &
What love does not (vv 4-7)
The very first thing that love does not:
“*Love does not envy!*” (v4)
 - Envy is the root of all “confusion” & every “evil thing”—
(Js 3:16) “Envy” & “self-seeking” interrelated —
Envy: “Others should not have it!”
Self-seeking: “I alone must have it!”
 - All sins are equally bad and sinful;
but “envy” is more cruel than several others —
Prov 27:4 ... *wrath ... anger ... jealousy*
 - Billy Graham says:
“Envy can ruin reputation, split Churches,
and cause murders.
Envy can shrink our circle of friends, ruin our businesses,
and dwarf our souls. I’ve seen hundreds cursed by it!”
 - Envy is self-destructive.
It affects our physical health also —
Prov 14:30 ... *envy ... rottenness to bones*
A common psychological cause for physical illness.

■ Biblical examples of envy and what we can learn from them:

□ Cain & Abel Gen 4:3-5

The cause of the first murder

Remedy: *Do well*. i.e. Set your life right (vv 6,7)

Interpretation: 1 Jn 3:11,12 ... *evil ... righteous ...*

□ Joseph & his brothers Gen 37:4,5,11/Acts 7:9

Lesson: If God blesses a person more than others,
it will be in order to somehow make him a blessing to others.
Joseph's brothers envied him; but finally he pitied them!
(Similarly, the elder brother envied the prodigal son.)

□ Miriam & Aaron against Moses

Num 12:1,2

A typical example of envy among God's servants.
It was actually ministerial jealousy;
they covered it up by attacking his personal life.

Envy usually takes the form of slander —

1 Pet 2:1,2 ... *envy ... evil-speaking*

Slander and accusation are demonic —

Rev 12:10,11 ... *overcome by blood*

Rom 8:33,34 ... *who ... condemns? ... Christ ... died*

God used the same argument against Miriam & Aaron.

□ Saul & David

1 Sam 18:7-9 ... Slaughter of Goliath ...

Saul ... 1000s ... David ... 10,000s

anger and envy

Envy because of pure misunderstanding —
vv 6,7 ... Women actually came to greet **Saul!**
Envy blinds our eyes to see the truth.

Saul should have thanked God for giving such a skill to David—

eg) Mt 9:8 ... *People glorified God for giving
such power to “men.”*

Jesus from their own village (v1)

eg) This was the spirit of John the Baptist towards Jesus—

Jn 3:26,27 ... *unless given from Heaven*

Look for opportunities to appreciate one another;
then there will be no room for envying (vv 30,31)

Don't envy a preacher who draws more crowd than you —

eg) Acts 13:44,45 ... Jews vs. Paul & Barnabas

■ How to overcome the temptation to envy:

a) Whoever scores, the ultimate victory

is for the Kingdom of God only.

Various analogies —

□ Body: 1 Cor 12:26b ... *When one member is honoured,
other members “rejoice” with it!*

□ Field work

Whether Paul or Apollos,
the grains go to the same barn!

□ Battle

Whether Saul kills Goliath, or David kills Goliath,
the victory is for Israel, God's people! (1 Sam 17:46,47)

Tamil Proverb:

“It matters not who pounds the paddy,
provided it becomes rice!”

யார் குத்தினாலென்ன, நெல் அரிசியானால் போதாதா?

b) Keep doing faithfully & concentrate on what God has assigned to you —
eg) The 2-talented man is not supposed to envy the 5-talented man; then he will be duly rewarded.
Gal 6:4 ... *Mind your own work ... rejoicing ... not in another*

- If you are envied —
Keep remembering your security in God —
eg) Joseph (Acts 7:9) ... *But God was with him!*
The Word of God worked deeply in him (Psa 105:19)
He acted on the principle of Psa 56:4 —
In God ... my trust ... what can flesh do to me?
Similarly, Psa 27:1 ... *The Lord is my Light ... salvation ... strength ... whom shall I fear?*

How not to Fellowship

8. Do not expect too much from others.

- An old saying goes like this —

Blessed are those who expect nothing;
for they shall not be disappointed!

We must never forget that this world is basically thankless—

- The first sin of mankind —

Rom 1:20,21 ... *since creation ... not thankful ...*
(vv 21-32 ... the darkest sin list in the Bible)

- This was Solomon's observation —

Eccl 9:13-15 ... *poor man ... saved city ... not remembered*
"Everywhere under the sun!"

- If there's one person who must be frustrated
than anyone else due to disappointments, it must be GOD!

Even though God is "*grieved*" over man's thanklessness
and negative response, He is never "frustrated!" —

He never gives up!

Only a few have disappointed us;
but as for God, "everyone" has disappointed Him!

God's disappointment began with Adam;
and it still continues —

eg) Isa 5:1-4, 7 ... *choicest vine ... wild grapes ...*

... *What more?*

Even though He punished them,
He did not forsake them ... 14:1 ... "*still*" loves Israel!

Jesus pointed out this character of God
and called us to be like Him —

Lk 6:32-36 ... *love ... do good ... lend ...*

God is kind to the “*unthankful*” also.
The sunrise and rainfall are the regular reminders
of this character of God — Mt 5:44,45

That is the mark of “*perfection*” (v48)

■ Jesus faced the same challenge in His life —

□ From the public Lk 17:12-17

— “*Where are the nine?*”

i.e. 90% unthankful.

Even for Jesus, only 10% were thankful!

— “*Were there no one except the foreigner?*”

i.e. Disappointment from those
from whom we expect most.

Those whom we least respect (Samaritan)
may be those who would stay thankful!

□ From His disciples

He knew that Peter would deny Him (Lk 22:31,32)

He knew all would desert Him (Mt 26:31)

But, He promised them thrones! (Lk 22:28-30)

His love was not a “because-of” love,

but an “in-spite-of” love!

That’s why He could love His disciples “*till the end*”

though they **kept on** disappointing Him.

Jn 13:1 (v2, devil enters Judas!)

“Disappointments must be cremated, not embalmed!”

□ His practical teaching:

When you arrange a dinner ...

Lk 14:12-14 ... **do not** ... *but ... they cannot repay you ...*
He said this to his host !!!

■ The apostles faced the same challenge —

□ Corinthian believers

2 Cor 12:15... *the more I love you... the less*
I'm loved... spend ... be spent ...
How could Paul do it? (v14b ... **like parents**)

□ Galatian believers

Gal 4:13-16 ... *once so loving ... but now ... enemy!*

Even if they turn against you—leave alone being ungrateful—
keep doing good ...

Rom 12:20,21 ... *enemy ... food ... coals ... evil ... good ...*

■ Some positive counsel:

□ Be dominated by the motto:

“Not to be served but to serve” (Mk 10:45)

Not what others do to me;
but what I can do to others!

Our very calling: To be a **blessing** to others
1 Pet 3:9

□ Keep your eyes **not** on the immediate outcome
but the ultimate reward —

Gal 6:9,10 ... *reap in due season ... opportunity*
Keep looking for opportunities to bless others!

□ God **alone** will not disappoint us —

Heb 6:10 ... *not unjust to forget ...*

Therefore —

TRUST IN THE LORD, AND DO GOOD! (Psa 37:3)

How not to Fellowship

9. Do not lose the spirit of friendship.

- We have seen —

“Friendship” can be with anyone;
but “fellowship” is with God’s people only.

But this does not mean
we must forsake the spirit of friendship
when we move into the fellowship of God’s people.

It’s unfortunate we lose the freedom and jubilation of friendship
the moment we walk into the company of God’s people.

But the Bible has so much to tell us that there must be
the spirit of “friendship” prevailing in our fellowships.

We call one another as “brothers & sisters” —
which means, we are of the same **family**;
but we don’t operate even at the level of **friendship**.

- We are to “*add*” love to *brotherly kindness* —
2 Pet 1:7
i.e. Add “friendship” to “fellowship”
- The early Church maintained this combination —
Acts 2:46,47 ... *jubilation ... favour with all men*
- Jesus was *a friend of “sinners;”*
we are not even friends of “saints!” (Mt 11:19; Lk 7:34)

See His relationship with His disciples —
Jn 15:15 ... *not servants but friends ...*
Lk 12:4 ... *to His disciples ... My friends*

Openness ... transparency ... closeness ... encouragement
When Jesus Himself calls us *friends*,
how can we be otherwise among ourselves?
He even called “Judas” as “*friend!*” (Mt 26:50)

- This truth runs thro’out the Scriptures —
 - Job & his friends
In this entire book, we don’t read about prayer meetings
or worship services, but deep expressions of friendship.
 - The Psalmist
119:63 ... **companion** to all who obey Your Word
 - Daniel & his friends
Dan 2:17,18 ... *companions*
 - Apostle John & believers
3 Jn 13,14 ... *see you ... face to face ... friends greet*
- Paul’s letters had so much of **personal** greetings —
 - eg) Rom 16
The word “*greet*” ... 17 times,
finally v16, “*holy kiss.*”
 - A warm handshake
 - A broad smile
 - A friendly look
 - An affectionate hug
 - A holy kiss
 - A loving enquiry
 - A hearty word of blessing
- Another example —
 - Boaz and his reapers (Ruth 2:4)
... *The Lord be with you ... The Lord bless you ...*
How mutually refreshing!

- Friendship is more than an earthly character; it's divine!

eg) God's friend: Abraham (Js 2:23)

God's friend: Moses (Ex 33:11)

Jesus' friend: John the Baptist (Jn 3:29)

(though relatives)

Jesus' friend: Lazarus (Jn 11:11)

- The Lord's Supper is one of the means to express the "friendship" of God's people —

- See how it all began —

Acts 2:46,47 ... *house to house ... bread ... gladness ... simplicity (no crookedness) of heart ... etc.*

That's why it was called "Love Feast" (Jude 12)

Love Feasts were fellowship meals

in which the Lord's Supper was observed —

implied from 1 Cor 11:21

But we have made it a ceremonial affair!

What is "*worthy*" participation?

1 Cor 11:23-32 ... The oft-read passage

in the Breadbreaking Services

Introduction? vv 20-22 ... Eating before others come

Conclusion? vv 33,34 ... *Wait for others.*

In other words,

what's emphasized is "fellowship + friendship"

— That's why it's called "**Communion**" Service!

It's not "taking" communion

— This is Roman Catholicism.

It's "partaking" in communion

— This is Biblical theology.

This is strongly emphasized in —

1 Cor 10:16,17 ... *communion ... one bread ... one body*

That's why "*footwashing*" is connected to it — Jn 13:4,5

Footwashing: an expression of hospitality extended to guests
in Bible times —

- Abraham's hospitality to three strangers (Gen 18:2-4)
- A woman in Simon's house (Lk 7:44)
- Who is a commendable widow? (1 Tim 5:10)

■ Read the Book of Proverbs which teaches

so much on friendship —

- Prov 17:9 ... Forgiveness becomes easy.
- 17:17 ... Especially for times of adversity
(Heb 10:33/Rev 1:9— *companion in suffering*)
- 18:24b... It's thicker than blood
"loving more than a brother!"
- 19:6b ... Trains us in generosity (11:25)
- 27:5,6 ... Mutual corrections easy
(soothing/refreshing — v9)
- 27:17 ... Improves our personality
(as iron sharpens iron)
—by *stirring up one another to do good works:*
Heb 10:24,25

How not to Fellowship

10. Do not limit your circle of fellowship.

- When we talk about fellowship,
we usually think about our **local** Church.

This is right only in a **narrow** sense.

When we say “the Body of Christ,”
it refers to the **universal** Church.

The local Church is only a **limited** expression
of the Body of Christ.

We become members of the Body of Christ
the moment we are born again —

even before we join any local Church!

- 1 Cor 12:13 ... *Baptized into one Body*
(placed in/inducted into ...)
- Part of a “large” family —
Heb 12:22-24 ... *general assembly ... registered in Heaven*
— not you “will” come to it;
but you “have” come to it!

CHURCH: NO SINNER INSIDE, NO SAINT OUTSIDE!

- There are several reasons why we must go beyond
our local Church—
 - (a) In the NT times, there was only one “Church”
for every city/town —
 - Church in “Jerusalem”* (Acts 8:1)
 - Church in “Corinth”* (1 Cor 1:2)
 - Church in “Antioch”* (Acts 13:1)

But when it was a province, there were “Churches”
Churches in “Galatia” (Gal 1:2)

But today there are so many Churches even in a single street !
As such, we must open up our hands of fellowship
to the members of the other Churches also —

eg) “*All in Rome ... beloved ... saints*” (Rom 1:7)
“*Church in Corinth **WITH** all saints in Achaia*” (2 Cor 1:1)
(Achaia was a country/province)

(b) There’s no single local Church bestowed with
all the Spiritual gifts —
especially the ministerial gifts: Eph 4:11

Which local Church has
Apostles, Prophets, Evangelists, Pastors & Teachers?
Rarest of the rare!
All-in-one is also very rare!

That’s why no local Church is strong in everything —
Some are strong in “Worship”
Some are strong in the “Word”
Some are strong in “Witnessing”
Some are strong in “Works of charity”

If you must be a balanced Christian,
you must open up to inter-Church fellowshiping —
Only then you experience a multi-dimensional growth.
Only with a combination of strengths of various Churches,
we can **impact** the society —

eg) Rom 15:18,19 ... *word ... deed ... signs ...*
“*word*” — Evangelicals
(Most of the Bible Study Aids are from this group)

“*deed*” — Mainline denominations
Schools, Hospitals, Relief Projects ...

“*signs and wonders*” — Pentecostals

We need each other!

Only then, we can witness —

“The whole Church
carrying the whole Gospel
to the whole World!”

- When we talk about fellowship, we should not only be
“inter-denominational” but also “inter-organisational.”

Each missionary/evangelistic/relief organisation
has got its own “strengths **and** weaknesses.”

We must have the large-heartedness of the Psalmist —
Psa 119:63 ... *A companion of all those who fear You!*
No reference to the level of spirituality!

- Learn to ignore the minor differences.
A good prescription by a 16th century theologian
— in essentials, unity!
 - eg) Deity of Christ, Justification by faith,
Supremacy of the Scriptures, etc.
- In non-essentials, liberty! Rom 14:5,6
 - eg) food regulations, observance of days, etc.
- In all things, charity!

In other words,
fellowship is on the basis of the
“*unity of the Spirit*” (Eph 4:3)
Already there! Maintain it!

Not on the basis of the

“Unity of the faith” (v13)

Not there yet! — Attain it!

“ ... to come to it” — still in the future.

From the *“Unity of the Spirit”* to the *“Unity of the Faith!”*

Until then, there will be “differences” 1 Cor 11:19

“Differences” must not lead to “divisions” (v18)

Remember,

Uniformity is **NOT** unity!

Sameness is **NOT** oneness!

Unity in diversity!

■ Some practical guidelines —

- Biweekly/monthly Prayer Gatherings of Christians of various Churches in one locality

To pray for —

Revival in all the Churches

Evangelisation of the Nation

Missionary Organisations

Evangelistic Agencies

Bible Translators, etc.

Avoid unnecessary discussions;

spend maximum time in prayer.

- Bible Study Fellowships

For collective meditation

Study notes & Courses

Avoid controversial issues.

- Evangelistic Outreach

“Fellowship in the Gospel” (Phil 1:5)

“Right hand of fellowship” (Gal 2:9)

Illustrate: How two fighting sailors on board
joined hands to rescue a sinking man
in the sea!

Inter-Church Evangelistic Crusades

Attend the special meetings of other Churches.

□ Pastors Fellowship

Psa 133 ... Unity begins with the leaders!

"... precious oil on the head ..."

Some Pastors don't even smile at each other!

Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together

With cords that cannot be broken;

Bind us together, Lord, Bind us together, Lord,

Bind us together in love!

■ **Conclusion**

Work with the Vision of

Rev 7:9,10 ... All nations ... tribes ... peoples ... tongues!
