

The Fellowship of the Redeemed

Intro

- What does God's Word say about the importance of fellowship?
- What relationship is there between fellowship & the experience of freedom in the struggle against sin?

Heb 10.19-25

***The groundwork is laid, (v 19-20) common ground
for the journey of fellowship, (v 21-25a) common journey
toward the hope of our calling. (v 25b) common destiny***

- ▶ John Bunyan, *The Pilgrim's Progress*
 - Two constants – temptation *and* movement (growth, progress).
 - An instructive interview - Interpreter, the Pilgrim, and a caged Christian
 - Question by question, Pilgrim discovers all the things this inmate neglected.
 - One of primary instruments God's Word gives us for our growth and the experience of freedom is fellowship.

Common ground: drawn together by the cross

Heb 10.19-22

- Intriguing how friendships & interest groups get formed around values or hobbies.
- ▶ Types, types, types...
 - Executives, salespeople, mechanics, homemakers, book types, travel types, cultured types, cheap types, closet Harley people, early birds, night owls, laid back people, compulsive people.

But what is the ground of our fellowship and unity?

The death of *division* in the death of Christ

- Christ's death marks the opening of the 'temple' of God's presence to all who believe – Jews and Gentiles, high priests and tax collectors alike.
- Types and shadows of this truth are now superceded by the in-breaking of New Covenant reality as the veil of the temple is rent.
- The cross was and is the power of God both to salvation as well as reconciliation – most significantly from man to God, but also very significantly man to man.

Eph 2.11-18

Gal. 3.26-29 “for in Christ Jesus you are all sons of God, through faith. For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is neither male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you are Christ's, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise.”

The Paul vs. Peter incident (Gal 2.11-16) illustrates the fact that the Jew/Gentile divide was a gospel-threatening issue, not simply a socio-ethnic concern.

Eph 3.6 “This mystery is that the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel.”

- These truths demonstrate how deep the foundations go for enduring friendship, authentic fellowship, and cooperative mission as believers!

“The same New Testament, which contains Paul's flash of individualism ‘I have been crucified with Christ’... also insists that Jesus Christ ‘gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good’. Thus the very purpose of his self-giving on the cross was not just to save isolated individuals, and so perpetuate their loneliness, but to create a new community whose members would belong to him, love one another and eagerly serve the world.... Christ died in abject aloneness, rejected by his own nation and deserted by his own disciples, but lifted up on the cross he would draw all men to himself.”

-John Stott, *The Cross of Christ*, p.255

Common journey: pressing toward the call

- We don't just share the experience of vs 19-21 – we share a responsibility to each other.

Heb 10.19-21 “Since we ... since we...”

Heb 10.22-25 “let **us** ... draw near to God, hold fast the confession of our hope, stir one another up to love and good works, not neglect to meet together, encourage one another as we see the Day drawing near.

“We want to participate in the quest for the ultimate in the context of the intimate. We want to know deeply and to be deeply known. If what you want is friendship—deep, satisfying, purposeful, long-lasting friendship—I believe the only way to find it is to pursue God. If what you want is God ... I believe that desire will bring you into contact and deeper relationship with a community of friends shaped by the same pursuit.”

-Richard Lamb, *The Pursuit of God In the Company of Friends*, p.13

- The call to assemble together and the call to meet with God were identical. The pursuit of God can never be divorced from fellowship with God's people.

“In fact, even cursory glances though the Gospels confirm that the work Jesus did in the lives of his disciples occurred because the disciples were in relationship, not simply with him, but with one another. That manner of growth in spiritual depth—in the context of community—is not accidental. It is part of how people are built. We were created to seek God, and we were created to find him with others. Not only does this reflect the strategy of Jesus, but just as crucially, it reflects the design of God.”

-Richard Lamb, *The Pursuit of God In the Company of Friends*, p.17

Heb 10.32-39 (listen to the ‘we’ language!)

- Freedom and fellowship are interwoven. They produce one another.

Common destiny: looking for the blessed hope

Heb 10.25 “not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.”

🔴 That’s the goal, and the New Testament church keeps it in constant view.

▶ A little tradition – “10 seconds til Daddy’s home”

Snapshot of Paul’s *baby* (Thessalonica)

The Thessalonians had been newly established and knowing how intense the persecution was in that city (Paul himself was driven out), Paul sends Timothy to establish them, which apparently meant:

1:2-9 - to remind them of God’s work in them

3:11-4:10 - to encourage them again toward fellowship & mutual upbuilding

4:13-5:11 - to remind them of what was in store for them – heaven!

5:11-5:20 - one more postscript for the practice of biblical fellowship

“Nor will it end (Rev 22.5). Its eternity is part of its glory; endlessness, on might say, is the glory of glory. Hearts on earth say in the course of a joyful experience, ‘I don’t want this ever to end.’ But it invariably does. The hearts of those in heaven say, ‘I want this to go on forever.’ And it will. There can be no better news than this.”

–J.I. Packer, Concise Theology, p. 266-267

Thessalonians, then, not surprisingly, lays out the same summary of biblical fellowship as Hebrews 10:

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