



## Sample Content

**Location:** Exploring Traditions

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Good morning - there is a chat on NE discussing fellowship. This essay, beautifully written by Dennis B (his full name is at the bottom) has been incredibly helpful to think more broadly about fellowship. It's truly everywhere and in every conversation!

While I've never met Dennis, I'm deeply thankful that he was moved to write this essay.

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### Meaning of "Fellowship"

Of all the topics we have discussed, meditated upon and prayed about since leaving the Friends & Workers sect, "fellowship" is near the top of the list.

There are numerous possible meanings or correct usages of the word "fellowship". When bounded religious groups (not just the F&W) use "fellowship" to refer to their regular meetings and periodic events, I believe it is a proper use of the term, but only in the general sense. When used in the Bible, it most often refers to spiritual fellowship with God.

When the primary emphasis is placed on attendance and participation in the meetings or events, rather than a common sharing of spiritual fellowship with God, it becomes a social interaction that may actually be an abomination. (Is 1:12-14; I Cor 11:17) According to I John 1:7, this is like getting the cart before the horse, or letting the cart become the horse.

1 John 1:7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

John is clearly saying that spiritual fellowship with one another is the RESULT of mutually walking in the light of Christ.

To me, that verse has very different connotations than what I had believed for years:

1. The focus is on being in fellowship with Jesus, not a bounded group of people.
2. The emphasis is on walking in the light of Christ, not gathering socially.
3. Walking in the light is continuous living, not periodic gatherings.
4. The fellowship with one another that results from mutually walking in the light is spontaneous, not scheduled.
5. IF we walk in the light of Christ, fellowship can occur with anyone who is also walking in the light, not just an exclusive group.

This perspective of fellowship fits well with the definition of the New Testament church being a Christ-centered, spiritual body, while the common perspective of fellowship as church gatherings fits the popular, albeit incorrect, idea of “the Church” being a bounded religious organization. The latter is so deeply ingrained in religious (including “Christian”) thinking that anyone who rejects it is usually considered a rebel or an apostate.

I have searched the NT, especially the words and example of Jesus, to find support for the popular definition of “the Church” and also for support of fellowship being frequent, regular, scheduled gatherings of bounded group members and have found nothing.

The emphasis I found for Christians was “being the church” not “going to church” or “belonging to a church”. Even the seven “churches” of the Revelation were individuals united only by their belief in Jesus and referred to only by their physical location, not separate denominations or sects or creeds.

I found that the only fellowship that Jesus had with his disciples was spontaneous (except possibly the Passover supper) and centered on Him. It occurred whenever and wherever circumstances placed them together, whether teaching on a mountain side, visiting the Temple, traveling in a boat, walking on a journey or sharing a meal.

Fellowship is not a bad thing. True spiritual fellowship is wonderful! But it is as likely to occur spontaneously in small groups of two or three as in large scheduled gatherings. As the two disciples said, “Did not our heart burn within us, while he talked with us by the way, and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24:32)

I believe it is wrong to limit fellowship to certain times, places and groups of people. I realize now that the type of limited fellowship I have experienced most of my life actually hindered me from having true spiritual fellowship with other believers in Christ whenever and wherever I encountered them.

It is much more comfortable for our human nature to be a part of something physical that we can see and socialize with, but the scripture says we can't see a spirit; we can only feel its effect and sense its presence. Opening my eyes, heart and mind to the works of faith exhibited by any/all believers in Christ, has presented many new and different opportunities for fellowship that I was totally overlooking before.

That is more confirming to my faith than having a perfect attendance record at any meetings or religious services!

Dennis Bengtson.