



YPS

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Inside this Issue
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**Assembly Principles
and Practice (2)
Fellowship**

Page 1

The Lord's Prayer (4)

Page 5

**Ancient Wisdom for
a Modern World**

Page 8

YPS

(Young Precious Seed) is a supplement of *Precious Seed* designed for those young in faith. Its purpose is to restate timeless truths from the word of God for a new generation of Christians and to kindle a biblical approach to current issues in the world in which we live.

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Assembly Principles and Practice

(2) Fellowship

In our last article we asked and sought to answer a number of questions on the subject of baptism. We want to follow a similar pattern with respect to the subjects of fellowship and reception. We may hear believers speak of 'reception into the local assembly', or of being 'received into fellowship'. It is important that we understand what this means before we look at the basis of how this is done. The questions we want to address are:

- What is fellowship?
- What is the basis of fellowship?
- What does it mean to be in fellowship?
- How should people be received into the fellowship of the local assembly?
- On what basis are people received?

What is fellowship?

In Luke chapter 5 verse 10 we read that, 'the sons of Zebedee ... were partners with Simon'. The word 'partners' is the word having the same root as the word 'fellowship'. It is otherwise translated 'partakers', describing those who work or toil together, sharing in the benefits of a business or enterprise, as well as sharing in its trials and tribulations.

There is a picture or illustration that we can use here. Fellowship, as the word suggests, describes fellows in the same ship. For James, John and Simon and their fellow workers it was important that they all pulled together and in the same direction. If the catch was to be landed and the business prospered there must be genuine fellowship. They must work together for the common good. If the work of the Lord is to be prospered and the assembly testimony maintained, it is



BY JOHN BENNETT

Assembly Principles and Practice **FELLOWSHIP**

important that we work together for that common aim.

Using this picture, there is no place in the vessel for passengers. We would not expect to share in the profits of a business if we had contributed nothing to their achievement. Are there those who contribute nothing to the assembly and yet expect to enjoy its privileges and blessings? This is not genuine fellowship! The scriptures will show us the need for involvement in every facet of the work of the Assembly.

What is the basis of fellowship?

In the first epistle of John chapter 1, the characteristics of fellowship are given us:

- Primarily, new birth – ‘our fellowship is with the Father, and with His Son Jesus Christ’, v. 3.
- As the basis of our fellowship is that we are saved so we should seek only the fellowship of those who are believers in Christ. Paul wrote to the Corinthians, ‘God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ our Lord’, 1 Cor. 1. 9.

- A common interest in the Word of God and its teaching – ‘That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us’, v. 3.

The enjoyment of fellowship is found in that which reveals to us more of the person of Christ. How precious to sit under the sound of the Word

of God and learn more of the Saviour!

- A desire for moral and spiritual purity – ‘If we walk in the light, as He is in the light, we have fellowship one with another’, v. 7.

To have fellowship with Divine persons we must manifest the same character in our daily lives.

What does it mean to be in fellowship in a practical sense?

The epistle to the Philippians is the epistle of fellowship and it is in this epistle that we shall find some of the different ways in which fellowship is expressed. In chapter 1 we find:

‘fellowship in the gospel’, v. 5.

It may be working alongside the preacher, in distributing literature or in visitation. It may be offering hospitality to the preacher. It may be inviting friends and neighbours to the gospel. It may be attending all the meetings that we are able to attend, work and household duties permitting. It may be praying for all the meetings and those that are not saved who attend. This is fellowship in the gospel.

In chapter 2 we find:

‘fellowship of the Spirit’, v. 1.

What does this mean? The context explains: ‘that ye be likeminded’, v. 2, ‘being of one accord, one mind’, v. 2, ‘let each esteem other better than themselves’, v. 3. The fellowship of the Spirit is that unity, and harmony that the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit generates within the assembly. It



There may be times when we need to put aside our own desires and ideas and bow to the desires of others as guided by the word of God.

is putting aside my own desires for the good of the company. This is particularly challenging to all of us when we live in a world that encourages us to please ourselves and 'do our own thing'. There may be times when we need to put aside our own desires and ideas and bow to the desires of others as guided by the word of God. Those that are truly spiritual have in mind the unity of the saints.

'fellowsoldier', v. 25.

Fellowship in the work and fellowship in the warfare! Fellowship in the work – 'he that ministered to my wants'. He had an interest in the needs of the Lord's servants. 'He longed after you all', v. 26. He had a deep interest in the spiritual welfare of the saints. Notice, too, 'for the work of the Lord he was high unto death, not regarding his life', v. 30. This is the extent of the fellowship that Epaphroditus was prepared to give for the furtherance of the work. True fellowship is a costly business!

These should be the hallmarks of fellowship. This is commitment, even when it costs.

But, if these are the principles, how do they work out in practice?

We read in Acts 2 of those principles being worked out in the life of the early church. For example, we read:

- 'they that gladly received his word were baptized', v. 41. The first company of Christians was composed of saved and baptized believers;
- 'they continued steadfastly in the apostle's doctrine', v. 42. They had an interest in spiritual teaching and spiritual food;

- 'all that believed were together, and had all things common', v. 44. These were people who had a heart for the Lord's people and a genuine desire for their blessing. This was expressed in the harmony and unity that characterized these early believers.

What, then, should be the basis upon which we receive people into the fellowship of the local assembly?

In the verses in Acts chapter 2 we see the necessity of spiritual life and the need for spiritual light – an appreciation of the privileges and responsibilities of fellowship.

But these would apply to those who are relatively new converts who, as they grow in spiritual things, desire the fellowship of the Lord's people. What of other circumstances?

In Acts chapter 9 verses 26-28 we find the situation of a relatively new convert unknown to the saints at Jerusalem. They know him as Saul of Tarsus, a vicious opponent of the truth. They did not know of his conversion. Yet, Saul desired to be received into the fellowship of the saints. It is clear from the words of verse 26 that Saul was not received, 'they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple'. Being unable to vouch for the man, Saul, they would not receive him. This was the exercise of godly care in respect to the assembly for Saul was known for the havoc that he had wrought amongst the early believers.

But then we read, 'Barnabus took him, and brought him to the apostles, and

Assembly Principles and Practice FELLOWSHIP

declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way', v. 27. Here, Saul is brought before the elders of the assembly, is interviewed and, later, is received and brought into the fellowship of the company as a consequence of the work of Barnabus. It is important to appreciate some essential aspects of the practice taught here. We would emphasize that:

- Barnabus brought Saul to a meeting with the apostles. This is not a meeting in the porch at the back of the hall a few minutes before the breaking of bread! This meeting would take time to rehearse the detail of Saul's conversion and to allay the fears of these elders.
- Barnabus was well known to these men and highly respected amongst them, as chapter 4 verses 36 and 37 show. Any recommendation he would make would be one in which they could have confidence. It is important not to put elders in a difficult position because we fail to appreciate the responsibility of care that they have. Barnabus understood this.

Reception to the fellowship of the assembly can be on the basis of personal introduction, provided time is given to elders to establish the facts.

In Romans chapter 16 verse 1-2, and 2 Corinthians chapter 3 verse 1, the apostle teaches us the need for a letter of commendation in the introduction of someone unknown to the assembly. The letter is written:

- to the whole assembly – though Paul's letter, and these verses, may have been read to the

assembly by an elder it was essentially a letter to the whole assembly.

- as an Introduction – that the person's spiritual credentials might be made known and their suitability for reception to the assembly established.
- to enable gift to be exercised – 'a servant of the church', Rom. 16. 1. She was an active member of the assembly and her particular gift might be a blessing to others – 'a succourer of many', v. 2.
- to further other aspects of Phoebe's business – 'that ye assist her', v. 2. Phoebe had business to do and the saints could assist her in that work and, in so doing, express their fellowship with Phoebe.

Reception can be on the basis of letters of commendation from one assembly to another.

Why is the issue of reception so important to the spiritual wellbeing of the assembly? In Acts chapter 20 verses 28-29 Paul speaks of 'grievous wolves' entering into the assembly. Similarly, in Jude verses 3-4, we read of 'certain men crept in unawares . . . ungodly men'. These were men who had gained access to the assembly, who had been received. In the latter case, certainly, they were men who were not saved and who were intent on the destruction of the assembly and the scattering of the saints.

The issue of assembly reception is a difficult one, particularly when it affects us personally. May we appreciate the responsibility of care that is in the hands of godly elders and, for the preservation of the saints and the unity of the assembly, bow to their judgement and support them in what can be a most difficult and



THE LORD'S PRAYER (4)

Man's Concerns

Dependence upon His grace

If the first three requests of the Lord's Prayer show us that we should be concerned, first and foremost, for God's glory, the second three show us our dependence upon His grace. They speak, in turn, of our need for provision, pardon and protection. This reflects, once again, the trusting relationship of a child with his father.

Provision

Give us this day our daily bread

One of the great ways in which an aspect of the love of God for the whole of mankind is shown is in His benevolence. God is good to all. We are, therefore, encouraged on the basis of His benevolence to all, to *be sure of God's care*. 'He waters the hills from his chambers: the earth is satisfied with the fruit of thy works. He causeth the grass to grow for the cattle, and herb for the service of man: that he may bring forth food out of the earth', Ps. 104. 13-14; 'These [animals and mankind] wait all upon thee; that thou mayest give them their meat in due season. That thou givest them they gather: thou openest thine hand, they are filled with good', Ps. 104. 27-28. Yet God has a particular interest in His own people, too. Our Lord says, 'Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed? . . . for your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things', Matt. 6. 31-32; 'Cast 'all your care upon him; for he careth for you', 1 Pet. 5. 7. God does care for mankind even to the extent of providing our everyday

needs. We are also to *depend upon His grace*. Though many of us who live in the West look to the supermarkets to provide our food, rather than depend upon our own production as large parts of the world still do, we must not lose sight of the fact that it

is God who guarantees the seasons for sowing and reaping and who is so good that He sends rain upon the just and upon the unjust. 'He giveth to all life, and breath, and all things', Acts 17. 25; 'While the earth remaineth, seedtime and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease', Gen. 8. 22. 'It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness', Lam. 3. 22-23.

This simple request for bread reminds us, too, that we are to *ask only for our needs*. Our Lord Himself said, speaking of food and clothing, 'your heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things', Matt. 6. 32. It is good to be able to pray, 'Two things have I required of thee; deny me them not before I die: Remove far from me vanity and lies: give me neither poverty nor riches; feed me with food convenient for me: Lest I be full, and deny thee, and say, Who is the Lord? or lest I be poor, and steal, and take the name of my God in vain', Prov. 30. 7-9. It is for our needs that we are to seek Him, not our greeds. We should not forget that, in asking for daily bread to sustain the body, there is daily spiritual food that our souls need.

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THE LORD'S PRAYER (4)

After all, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God', Matt. 4. 4. A daily reading of the Bible is every bit as essential to the believer as a daily meal.

Pardon

'And forgive us our trespasses'

That little word 'and' here gives us the important link between daily food for the body and daily pardon for the soul. *The need for pardon* is laid down very plainly in the Bible. *Sin separates us from God*, ('your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid his face from you, that he will not hear', Isa. 59. 2; Gen. 3. 8-10); and *sin soils us before God*, ('blot out my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from mine iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin', Psa. 51.1-2; 'Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean: wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow', Ps. 51. 7).

This regular prayer for forgiveness is not that first prayer for forgiveness that we plead when we come to Him in faith to be saved; it is, instead, that regular prayer that a believer, a child of God, should daily pray knowing that un-confessed sin always breaks our communion with God and leaves us with a sense of dirtiness.

The basis for pardon clearly laid down in the Bible is the

shedding of the blood of a sacrifice. 'Almost all things ... are purged with blood; and without shedding of blood is no remission', Heb. 9. 22. In the Old Testament time this was always the blood of bulls, goats, sheep etc. Yet, 'it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins', Heb. 10. 4. It was essential, therefore, that God provide a sufficient sacrifice for sins. So God sent His Son into the world, who 'was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all', Isa. 53. 5-6. 'And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins: But this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God', Heb. 10. 11-12. So God can, and will, forgive us our trespasses because 'the blood of Jesus Christ, God's son, cleanseth us from all sin', 1 John 1. 7. But, you may say, doesn't the Lord's Prayer teach us that God will forgive our trespasses if we forgive those who trespass against us? Isn't forgiveness of sin, therefore, conditional? Not at all. God's forgiveness of our sin is entirely of grace and not of merit and it never comes as a result of anything we do. We are reminded in this Prayer that our forgiveness of others is *proof of pardon*. The proof that we have and know this pardon, this forgiveness, and our enjoyment and appreciation of it, is shown in our attitude to others. 'Be ye kind one to another, tender-hearted, forgiving one



Times of testing not only prove to others, and to us, that we are genuine in our faith, but they also bring glory to God.

another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you', Eph. 4. 32. If we refuse to forgive someone else's relatively minor sin against us, it shows we have not even begun to appreciate God's great forgiveness shown to us, Matt. 18. 23-35.

Protection

Lead us not into temptation but deliver us from evil

The last of the three requests for God's provision is for His protection. Does this passage teach us that God can lead us into a situation where we are tempted to sin? There are at least three ways in which we need to define the word, 'temptation'. There is such a thing as *temptation to sin*. Now God, who is holy, cannot and will not tempt us to sin. 'Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God: for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man', Jas 1. 13-14. On the other hand, the word 'temptation' can sometimes be translated 'testing'. God can, and sometimes does, lead us into *testing times and experiences*. 'Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you', 1 Pet. 4.12. These testing times come for a variety of reasons. It may be that God is testing us to *prove our faith*. This was certainly the case with Job. It may be, on the other hand, that God is testing us to *purify our faith*. These times of testing not only prove to others, and to us, that we are genuine in our faith, but they also bring glory to God. We are sometimes tested so that 'the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be

found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ', 1 Pet. 1. 6-7. Sometimes, however, we may be tempted to sin and doubt God when we are in these times of testing and they then can become times of temptation. We can pray that God will both keep us *from* them and keep us *in* them, for 'God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it', 1 Cor. 10. 13.

Deliver us from evil

So we can look to God for protection from and in times of testing and also from evil. The phrase 'deliver us from evil' can be understood to refer to evil itself or to 'the evil one.' That evil is real cannot be doubted. There are evil men, evil times and evil things in this world. 'The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work', 2 Tim. 4. 18; 'Evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived', 2 Tim. 3.13; 'Pray for us . . . that we may be delivered from wicked and evil men. For not all have faith', 2 Thess. 3.1-2. Yet Satan himself, sometimes known as the evil one, is also a very real threat. 'The Lord is faithful. He will establish you and guard you against the evil one', 2 Thess. 3. 3; 'I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one', 1 John 2. 13. 'When any one heareth the word of the kingdom, and understandeth it not, then cometh the wicked one, and catches away that which was sown in

Ancient Wisdom for a Modern World



Wise words from the New Testament

Pride goeth before destruction and a haughty spirit before a fall, Prov. 16. 18

BY IAN REES

▶ his heart', Matt. 13. 19. Yet we can be delivered from him and his power, for despite his desire to sift the disciples as wheat, the Lord said, 'I have prayed for thee, that thy faith fail not', Luke 22. 31-32, and we know that His prayer prevailed.

The simple teaching of this part of the Lord's Prayer, then, is that God is able to give His children provision, pardon and protection. However we phrase our requests, most of what we need is covered by these three things. Do not be afraid to ask God for the ordinary, hum-drum things of life. After all, He knows what we are like and what we need. And though He is interested in preserving His own glory, the first three requests of this pattern prayer, He is also interested in showing us His grace. Indeed, He gets great glory when He shows us great grace.

Do not be afraid to ask God for the ordinary, hum-drum things of life. After all, He knows what we are like and what we need.

No one, other than the proud himself, likes a proud person. God likes the proud least of all. One of the seven things that are an abomination to God is 'a proud look', Prov. 6. 17. This is because pride is the exact opposite of what God looks for in His creatures; it is 'the fear of the Lord' that is the beginning of wisdom, and those that are proud, self-sufficient and arrogant will never begin to fear God.

Solomon reminds us that those who set themselves up over others inevitably invite a humbling. Sometimes this humbling comes from their own folly and pride. Proud people often overstretch themselves, trust more in their own abilities than they should, and so bring trouble upon themselves. Sometimes the proud make so many enemies that others delight in humbling them. More often than not, however, it is God who brings them down, 'Whosoever shall exalt himself shall be abased', Matt. 23. 12. Proud King Nebuchadnezzar, for instance, was turned out of his palace in his madness to live rough in a field because of his pride, Dan. 4; King Uzziah was struck down with leprosy because he thought too much of himself and behaved as though he were a priest, 2 Chron. 26; King Herod was eaten by worms because he accepted the worship of people, Acts 12; Lucifer was thrown out because he tried to make himself equal with God, Isa. 14. God resists the proud, Jas. 4. 6, and He will destroy the house of the proud, Prov. 15. 25, 'for every one that is proud is an abomination unto the Lord', Prov. 16. 5.

Even the wisdom of the world says, 'The bigger they are the harder they fall'. The trouble is, everyone waits for the proud to get their come-uppance and most rejoice when the proud are humbled. 'The most proud shall stumble and fall, and none shall raise him up', Jer. 50. 32. Don't set yourself up over others; don't boast about yourself or your gifts; don't have a higher opinion of yourself than you should. 'Let each esteem the other better than himself.' And remember, if you want to be exalted by God, you must humble yourself. After all, 'Though the Lord be high, yet hath he respect unto the lowly: but the proud he knoweth afar off', Ps. 138. 6; and God has said, 'To this man will I look, even to him that is poor and of a contrite spirit, and trembleth at my word', Isa. 66. 2. The advice once given to a young man is still good advice - 'Go slow, keep low and don't blow'.