

CHAPTER 27 - THE FELLOWSHIP OF SAINTS

Foundations of Fellowship

1. *All saints are united to Jesus Christ their head by His Spirit and by faith. But this does not mean that they become one person with Him. Yet they have fellowship in His graces, sufferings, death, resurrection and glory. Also, as they are united to one another in love, they enjoy fellowship in the gifts and graces of one another, and are under obligation to render such services, public and private, as promote their mutual well-being, in both spiritual and temporal matters.*

(a) *The saints' union with Jesus Christ.*

1. This is the basis of our fellowship with each other. Our fellowship is not a merely human togetherness, nor is it directly with each other, but it is because we are first united to Christ. This union with Christ is a spiritual one ("by His Spirit"), entered into "by faith". See Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 3:16-17.
2. It is pointed out that this union with Christ does not make Christ and the saint one person. When the Confession was written there were those who thought of it in this way. And today there are cults who teach that we may become 'gods' (Mormons and some extreme charismatics). Some evangelicals talk of 'Christ living His life through us' as if we are no longer active personalities.
3. On the basis of this union with Christ the saints receive all that Christ possesses as our mediator, specifically His death, resurrection and exaltation (Romans 6:1-6, Ephesians 2:4-6, Colossians 3:3-4).

(b) *The saints' union with each other.* Those united to Christ love Him and love all those who are also united to Him. We are members of the same body with Christ as the head. As members of Christ we do not, therefore, exist for ourselves, but for Christ and each other (Romans 14:7-8, 1 Corinthians 12:25, 1 Peter 4:10). Whatever "gifts and graces" we have received from the Lord we are to use for one another. There is thus an "obligation" to serve one another, for the benefit of the other (Romans 1:12, 12:10-13, Galatians 6:10, 1 Thessalonians 5:11,14, 1 Peter 3:8, 1 John 3:17-18).

Specific Duties of Fellowship

2. *By their profession of faith, saints are committed to the maintenance of a holy fellowship and communion in the worship of God and in the performance of such other special services as promote their mutual well-being. They are also bound to relieve one another in their temporal concerns according to their various needs and abilities. According to the rule of the gospel, this type of fellowship, while it particularly applies to the family and church relationships of saints, is to be extended, as God gives opportunity, to the whole household of faith, that is to say, to all who in every place call upon the Name of the Lord Jesus. At the same time, however, it must be understood that such a sharing one with another as saints, does not deprive any man of the title and proprietorship which he has in his own goods and possessions, nor does it infringe such title.*

(a) ***Types of fellowship.***

1. *“Worship of God...and other special services”*. We must be faithful to be with our fellow saints, especially at the public gatherings of the church (Acts 2:42, Hebrews 10:24-25). As members of the same body we must make every effort to be together whenever the saints meet. More private duties for our “mutual well-being” include prayer together; edifying talk, such as admonishing, exhorting and stirring one another up to love and good works; admonishing the idlers, encouraging the fainthearted, helping the weak (1 Thessalonians 5:14).
2. *“Temporal concerns”*. This is the example of the church as it began in Jerusalem (Acts 2:44-45, 4:32,34-37). The problem of division between Hellenists and Hebrews began over helping their widows by a daily distribution (Acts 6:1). Paul gives instructions about assistance to widows by outlining who a true widow is (1 Timothy 5:3-16). Jesus says that the day of judgment will be about how we have helped those who are saints in their material needs (Matthew 25:35-36). Some have dubbed the early church’s communion of possessions an early experiment in ‘communism’, but it is clear that none were compelled (see the problem with Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5:4). There is nothing unBiblical about having personal possessions, or even being rich. What is important is how we use what God has entrusted to us.

(b) ***Extent of fellowship.*** It is to those who make a “profession of faith”. In principle, it is to all who make such a profession wherever they may be. When needs outside our own church, and even outside our own country, come to our attention in God’s providence, then we should help as we are able – not only sending money, but also sending messengers of the gospel. One of Paul’s great concerns for his Gentile Christian converts was to help the poor Jewish Christians (Acts 11:29, Romans 15:25-27, 2 Corinthians 8-9). May the Lord help us to use all our resources in a God-honouring way.