

THE REFLECTOR

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Aug. 1979

"GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY"

I am writing these lines while in a gospel meeting with a small church in northern Florida. I am not much of one to write up my meetings (maybe it's because that with the kind of preaching done there is little to write about), but there is something about this meeting worth reporting. No, it's not the quality of preaching, though it is outstanding in this writer's humble, unbiased and objective judgement. It is not the attendance, though we had good attendance last night. It is not the "visible results" -- so far, no one has even gotten up and walked out! *It is the hospitality.*

I am writing these lines on a typewriter furnished by my host. When I arrived yesterday (Aug. 6) afternoon, I learned that the man had insisted on "keeping the preacher" this week, even though there were others who were just as willing. I had already received a letter from his wife (I have stayed here before), inviting me to supper, though she would need to be away from home. When I arrived, a lady, who had been hired to come in, was preparing a delicious meal. I was shown a most comfortable room, with everything a preacher would need, by the man's son. When the man arrived home from work we ate the meal and talked about the coming week. I got the distinct feeling that my being there was a pleasure to them rather than a chore that they were performing. My host even offered to fix my breakfast for this morning before going to work. I declined (5 A.M.), though I did (now, get this, preachers) get up in time to have coffee with him. I am sorry that his wife cannot be here to see how hospitable he can be (she was just as gracious when I stayed in this home before) -- but I suspect

she already knows. I now know that hospitality is a joint project with this couple.

Then, I arrived at the church building last night to find a "meal list" filled for the week. It is not that I need all that food -- why do you think I declined breakfast this morning? You probably thought it was because it was to be at 5 A.M. Mind you, that list involved 13 meals in nearly as many homes and this congregation does not have many more homes than that!

Last night after services I went over to some folks' house, after they insisted, for a pleasant visit. Beside all of this, 3 young people from the Birmingham area are staying in the homes of members here this week after having received invitations prior to the meeting.

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GOSPEL MEETING

OCT. 29-NOV. 4, 7:30 P. M.

H. E. Phillips

FIRST IN A SERIES ON:

"The Fellowship Question"

*"No doubt there have to be differences among you to show which of you have God's approval."
1 Corinthians 11:19 New International Version.*

Differences, small and great, have always bothered the people of God. With these differences has always been *"the fellowship question"*. It will not go away because differences do not go away. Differences may differ from place to place, from person to person, from generation to generation, from congregation to congregation -- but the question remains constant -- *whom shall we include in our circle of "fellowship"?*

"Institutionalism", with associated issues, has been a spiritual storm of hurricane proportions. It has raged over the past two or three decades. Churches have divided. Brethren have been alienated. Words have been sharp. Attitudes, on occasion, have been questionable. The fellowship question has been associated with this controversy all along, but in recent years it has grown until it threatens to become a major storm of itself, if it has not already.

Two extreme attitudes toward fellowship have emerged from the controversy: 1. Since we can not fellowship ALL brethren with whom we differ, we must not fellowship ANY; and, 2. Since we do fellowship SOME brethren with whom we differ, we must fellowship ALL. Neither of these positions is fully and consistently applied, but they exist in expressions used by brethren just the same. The bottom line being that of splintering brethren into little groups that can have no fellowship with each other because they cannot agree on every point. Or, that of accepting all baptized believers (some even go beyond that) regardless of their faith and practice on other matters. On the one hand, it becomes a matter of pressing EVERY difference to an early settlement, either by all agreeing or to a divisive climax. On the other hand, it becomes a matter of UNIVERSAL fellowship of professed Christians. There must be a more excellent way.

"Fellowship" in the New Testament

Fellowship, with one exception, is translated from *KOINONIA*, *KOINONOS*, *KOINONEO*, *KOINONIKOS* or *SUNKOINONEO*. The basic idea is that of sharing, partnership, or communion. Like other New Testament words, while the usage is always consistent with the basic meaning, they take on special and spiritual significance when used by Christians.

For example, *BAPTISMA* (or *BAPTISMOS*, *BAPTIZO*) has a basic meaning of dipping or washing by dipping. Sometimes it is used in its ordinary meaning (Luke 7:4; John 13:26). But its spiritual application is its most common usage in the New Testament.

EKKLESIA (church) has the basic meaning of a called-out assembly. On rare occasions it is used in its ordinary (or secular) connotation by New Testament writers (Acts 19:32,39,41), but its spiritual significance is the far more common meaning in the New Testament.

So, *KOINONIA* (-OS, -EO, -IKOS) has a basic meaning and can be used in its ordinary sense of partnership (Lk. 5:11). But, for the most part, it takes on a spiritual meaning when used by the writers of the New Testament. It is spiritual partnership.

It is interesting to note that *no fellowship*, either as a relationship or action, is said to exist between Christians and non-Christians in the New Testament. However, there are different ways in which Christians have fellowship (sharing, partnership, communion). (Non-Christians are in fellowship with Satan).

Christians have fellowship with the Godhead and with each other by sharing those things belonging to the Godhead that Deity wishes to share with them. Hence, we have fellowship with God and each other in "light", "truth", "righteousness", etc. (See 1 John 1:7ff.) We have fellowship with Christ and each other in His suffering (1 Pet. 4:13; Heb. 10:33) and His humanity (Heb. 2:14). We also share in things of the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). As long as we hold these things in common we have fellowship with God and each other.

Then, there are specific acts expressive of fellowship between Christians. "*Distributing* (KOINONEO) to the necessity of saints (Rom. 12:13) and giving "the right hands of fellowship (KOINONIA)" are such acts. When New Testament Christians shared their goods with other Christians, it was a gift, but it was more than a mere gift -- it expressed their fellowship! Under KOINONIA, W.E. Vine gives as its second meaning: "that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution, e.g., Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4." Both individuals and churches fellowshiped other Christians (with their gifts). Individual Christians gave gifts other than these fellowship-gifts, but no church did. Rich Christians were admonished to "distribute" (not KOINONIA) and to "communicate" (KOINONIA). While these "communications" (KOINONIA) may have been "distributions", not all "distributions" were "communications" (KOINONIA). The only kind of giving to the needy done by the church was fellowship-giving, hence only to saints (with whom they had fellowship).

Functioning unit of Fellowship

While Christians are in fellowship with other Christians (those who make up the "universal" church) and may express that fellowship in various ways, there is a special functioning unit of fellowship (local church) authorized in which Christians are to share or be in partnership in a very special way. They join together to share in collective worship, collective work, collective discipline, under common directive (eldership) as authorized by Christ. In joining themselves together (one kind of fellowship) they have not given up their rights and obligations to act individually under God in any of these fields.

Now, we are ready to talk about "fellowshipping", as generally used in our discussions on the fellowship question.

Four levels of Fellowship

A Christian may enjoy at least four distinct, yet closely related, levels of fellowship with another Christian:

1. Joe obeys the gospel and, thus, begins walking in light (cf. Col. 1:12-14, 1 Jno. 1:7), coming into fellowship with God and Sam who also is walking in light. Joe and Sam are in fellowship though they have never heard of each other.
2. Joe is visiting his sister one day and meets Sam. Joe and Sam learn that each other is a Christian. Joe's sister, knowing them both well, convinces each that the other is indeed a faithful Christian. Hence, Joe and Sam recognize each other's fellowship with God and saints. This recognition is a second level of fellowship. Each now knows that he fellowships the other.
3. Sam drives out to Rolling Springs to teach a class. Joe, knowing the price of gasoline, asks Sam if he may help Sam with the expense. Sam agrees to accept. Joe sends Sam \$10 each week. Joe is "fellowshipping" (Gal. 6:6 - communicating) unto Sam. Hence, a third level of fellowship.

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4. Joe moves over near Sam and "places membership" with the congregation where Sam is a member. Joe and Sam are now in fellowship in another way -- a fourth sense. This is congregational fellowship.
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GIVEN TO HOSPITALITY

I am relating this account for one purpose: to point out a trait of Christianity that I am afraid is fast becoming lost to many of us. Four times *hospitality* is commanded of Christians (Rom. 12:15; 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:9). Twice to the eldership, twice to Christians in general. The word means, according to Strong's Concordance, "fond of guests". Have we become so tied up or indifferent that we are no longer fond of guests. Do we really like to have company over? Maybe for a meal, or refreshments, or maybe just to "sit a spell"?

I am afraid that our hospitality (?) has been reduced to a mere willingness to supply a need. If someone NEEDS a meal, we will see that he gets it. If someone NEEDS a place to stay we will try to find him one. All of this is good as far as it goes. We should attend to the needs of others. But that is benevolence and not hospitality.

How often are our invitations to others just empty gestures? We say, "come to see us" or "come over sometimes", as we

leave them standing as we rush off to our activities or solitude. When is the last time you specifically invited someone to be your guest (either at home or in some other place) -- and went out of your way to make them feel that you really did want their company?

When is the last time you, like Lydia, "contrained" someone to come into your home (or to go out with you)? How hospitable are we to folks who visit our services? I mean more than just being friendly -- I mean showing a real desire to entertain them as guests after services. Sure, most of them can afford to buy something to eat and get a place to rest -- perhaps better than we have to offer. That is not the point! We need to be "fond of guests" for our own spiritual well being. I guarantee you that a person really "given to hospitality" is blessed as much, if not more than his guests. Try it, you might like it.

One word of caution. Don't just start inviting folks and signing meal lists at meeting time just to keep the preacher off your back. That would be grudgingly (1 Pet. 4:9)
--Editor

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SCHEDULE OF SERVICES

Sundays:	
Bible Classes	9:45 A.M.
Worship	10:45 A.M.
Worship	6:30 P.M.
Wednesdays:	
Bible Classes	7:30 P.M.

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