

**What is Fellowship?**  
**by Bob Young**  
**August 2008**

We use the word so easily—fellowship. What do we mean? What do others hear? What happens when we use words not familiar to others? Religious “jargon” leads to misunderstanding and miscommunication. We must ask ourselves, “Do we use the word biblically?” We talk about fellowship dinners, fellowship halls, and refer to social events as opportunities for fellowship. Surely biblical fellowship (Greek, *koinonia*) is more than these things!

Not long ago I prepared a flyer to advertise a new Bible class being offered in Spanish. In describing what guests could expect in the class I used the Spanish word “comunion.” A brother reviewing the flyer asked, “You’re not going to have communion in the class, are you?” Fortunately, this brother had a good working knowledge of Spanish, and almost immediately followed his question with an observation. “Oh, you’re saying we will share fellowship.” Precisely! Fellowship is communion. Spanish has another word which is sometimes used to describe fellowship and relationships (*companerismo*), but the preferred Spanish word is *comunion*. Fellowship events may provide *companerismo*, but genuine *koinonia* is *comunion*.

The Greek word (*koinonia*) is translated into English with words like fellowship, communion, and even contribution. It describes relationships—marriage, business, spiritual. The context determines the meaning. Three other words used to translate *koinonia* are association, participation, and sharing.

\*Those who share fellowship **associate** with one another. Genuinely being a family depends on fellowship. That we are born of the same birth, filled with the same Spirit, and sharing the same Abba Father unites Christians in a common association. The “tie that binds” is not recreational, social, economic, or racial. Where there is no association there is no fellowship. If a Christian ceases to associate with other Christians, that person is outside the fellowship by definition. One officially cut off from the church in a disciplinary action (the action of withdrawing) can correctly be described as “dis-fellowshipped.” But we struggle when we try to withdraw something that does not exist.

\*Fellowship involves **participation**. One baptized into Christ is a child of God, a member of the body of Christ, a dwelling place of the Spirit. His participation in the Godhead demands his participation and identity with others who are likewise children of God, members of the body, and Holy Spirit filled. Fellowship means we think in terms of “we/us” rather than “they/them.” To seek fellowship without participation is a contradiction. Reminds me of a cartoon from long ago in which the insurance agent was asking the preacher, “Do you have a non-participating plan?” No!

\***Sharing** is a part of genuine fellowship. Fellowship demands mutuality, caring, sharing. Suffer with the suffering, rejoice with the honored. Put others ahead of self. (1 Cor. 12:26; Rom. 12:15-16; Phil. 2:1-4). Sharing with others brings commonality (“in common”) according to Acts 2:42.

Interesting, isn’t it? Communion, common, community. The early church shared fellowship because they shared Christ. Common priorities, principles, values, goals, beliefs. This kind of fellowship brings glory and honor to God.