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|   | Transliteration:<br><i>koinōnia</i><br><small>(conversion from Greek to English)</small> |  |
|  | Pronunciation: koi-nō-nē'-ä;<br>koy-nohn-ee'-ah  |  |
|  | Strong's: G2842 - <i>koinōnia</i>  |  |
| <b>Definition:</b> a noun denoting "fellowship," "community" throughout most of its twenty occurrences in the Bible. It emphasizes the worth of Christian community bound together by faith and trust in Christ. |  |  |
| <b>This Week:</b> World Communion Sunday   | <b>Sermon:</b> "Koinonia"  |  |
| <b>Scripture Focus:</b> Acts 11:1-18; Galatians 2:11-14; Genesis 12:1-3  |  |  |

Fellowship describes the bond of common purpose and devotion that binds Christians to one another and to Christ. "Fellowship" is the English translation of words from the Hebrew stem *chabar* and the Greek stem *koin-*. The Hebrew *chabar* was used to express ideas such as common or shared house (Prov. 21:9), "binding" or "joining" (Exod. 26:6; Eccles. 9:4), companion (Eccles. 4:10), and even a wife as a companion (Mal. 2:14). *Chabar* was used for a member of a Pharisaic society. Pharisees tended to form very close associations with one another in social, religious, and even business affairs. A most important dimension in their lives was the sharing together in the study of Scripture and law and table fellowship.

The Gospels record no saying of Jesus in which He used the *koin-* stem to describe "fellowship" among disciples, though certainly the close association shared by Jesus and His followers laid the foundation for the church's post-Easter understanding of fellowship.

*Koinonia* was Paul's favorite word to describe a believer's relationship with the risen Lord and the benefits of salvation which come through Him. On the basis of faith, believers have fellowship with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9). We share fellowship in the gospel (1 Cor. 9:23; Phil. 1:5). Paul probably meant that all believers participate together in the saving power and message of the good news. Believers also share together a fellowship with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14), which the apostle understood as a most important bond for unity in the life of the church (Phil. 2:1-4).

The tendency of many Christians to refer to the Lord's Supper as "communion" is rooted in Paul's use of the term *Koinonia* in the context of his descriptions of the Lord's Supper. He described the cup as "sharing in the blood of Christ," and the bread as "sharing" of the body of Christ (1 cor. 10:16). Paul did not explain precisely how such "sharing" takes place through the Supper. He emphatically believed the Supper tied participants closer to one another and to Christ. Such "sharing" could not be shared with Christ and with other gods or super-natural beings. Thus Paul forbid his readers from partaking in pagan religious meals, which would result in sharing "fellowship" with evil, super-natural forces or demons (1 Cor. 10:19-21).

Immediately after Paul spoke of "fellowship" with Christ through participation in the Lord's Supper, he said, "Since there is one bread, we who are many are one body" (1 Cor. 10:17). This illustrates clearly Paul's belief that fellowship with Christ was to issue into fellowship between believers. Once we grasp this, it is easy to understand why Paul was so angry over the mockery that the Corinthians were making of the Lord's Supper. While claiming to partake of this sacred meal, many Corinthian Christians ignored the needs of their brothers and sisters and actually created factions and divisions (1 Cor. 11:17-18), "For in eating, each of you takes his own supper ahead of others, and one person is hungry while another is drunk!" (1 Cor. 11:21).

*Koinonia* with the Lord results not only in sharing His benefits (the gospel and the Holy Spirit), but also sharing His sufferings (Phil. 3:10; Col. 1:24). These texts express clearly just how intimate was Paul's perception of the close relationship between the believer and the Lord. The pattern of self-sacrifice and humility, demonstrated most profoundly through Jesus' suffering on the cross (Phil. 2:5-8), is to mark the current life of the disciple. Just as Jesus gave so completely of Himself for the sake of His people, so, too, are believers to give completely of themselves for the sake of the people of God (2 Cor. 4:7-12; Col. 1:24). The pattern of following Christ in suffering continues for the believer, in that just as Christ entered into glory following His suffering (Phil. 2:9-11), so, too, will the believer in the future share in the glory of Christ if "we suffer with Him" (Rom. 8:17).

Paul believed that Christians were to share with one another what they had to offer to assist fellow believers. Paul used the *koin-* stem to refer to such sharing. One who has received the word ought to "share" it with others (Gal. 6:6). Though it is not translated "fellowship" in English versions, Paul actually used the term *koinonia* to denote the financial contribution which he was collecting from Gentile believers to take to Jerusalem for the relief of the saints who lived there (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4; 9:13). The reason he could refer to a financial gift as *koinonia* is explained by Rom. 15:27: "For if the Gentiles have shared in their (the Jewish Christians') spiritual benefits, then they are obligated to minister to Jews in material needs". In this case, each offered what they were able to offer to benefit others: Jewish Christians their spiritual blessings, Gentile Christians their material blessings. Such mutual sharing of one's blessing is a clear and profound expression of Christian fellowship.

Finally, for Paul, *koinonia* was a most appropriate term to describe the unity and bonding that exists between Christians by virtue of the fact that they share together in the grace of the gospel. When Paul wished to express the essential oneness of the apostolic leadership of the church he said concerning James, the Lord's brother, Peter, and John, that they "gave the right hand of fellowship to me: (Gal. 2:9). When we realize that this expression of *koinonia* came on the heels of one of the most hotly debated issues in the early church, namely the status of Gentiles in the people of God (Gal. 2:1-10; Acts 15), we can see how powerful and all encompassing Paul's notion of Christian fellowship was.

Like Paul, John also affirmed that *koinonia* was an important aspect of the Christian pilgrimage. He affirmed emphatically that fellowship with God and the Son was to issue in fellowship with the other believers (1 John 1:3, 6-7).

**Additional Scriptures:** Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 1:9; Philipp 2:1; 1 John 1:3, 6-7