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through the prophet Joel that in the age of the Holy Spirit (in which we are now) there is no distinction whatsoever in receiving spiritual blessings, therefore the Holy Spirit is available to all of us. However, caution needs to be taken here because we may be falling into or making a limitation by ourselves! That limitation could be in me and in you unless we are careful, and it would be a tragedy. What then, is the limitation? Simply this—whether we are willing to seek after the Holy Spirit or not.

Conclusion

Hence, we all need to receive the Holy Spirit to go out and to be witnesses of our Lord Jesus Christ and to evangelize the world. A tragedy of making self-limitations after the event of Pentecost is recorded as a great warning to us: Ananias and his wife Sapphira ([Acts 5:1–11](#)).

Truly, the theology of evangelism is the theology of the Bible as well as the theology of the Christian church. The concept of trinitarian missiology is the divine revelation seen all through the entire course of the revealed history of the Bible from the beginning to the end, and accordingly it should be the goal of both Christians and the church.

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The Fellowship of the Church in the Book of Acts

Robert E. Coleman

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In this fine exegetical study Coleman analyses the various aspects of Christian fellowship, such as unity, mutual supports, corporate meetings, their places and time, internal tensions and relationships, nurture of the believers, etc. His call to reemphasize the element of fellowship in all our carefully ordered modern worship services is urgent and relevant. The emphasis on family and personal relationships in the early church fellowship is something that present day congregations can learn with benefit.

Editor

BODY LIFE

Responding to the Gospel invitation brought one into association with other persons of like faith. This fellowship of kindred spirits constituted ‘the church of the Lord’ ([20:28](#)), those called out from the world to follow Christ, and as such was the primary means by which disciples were trained. Just as Jesus had lived closely with His followers, so now the gathered community of believers formed an ongoing communion with His Spirit.

In a visible present sense, the church filled the role of Christ's body in the world ([1Cor. 12:27](#)).¹ Christ was the head ([Eph. 1:22](#); [Col. 1:18](#); [2:19](#)), with the redeemed functioning as vital members of the body, and thereby 'severally members one of another' ([Rom. 12:5](#); cf. [12:4](#); [1Cor. 12:20](#)). Not all the believers had the same office ([Rom. 12:4](#)), but 'according to the grace that was given' ([Rom. 12:6](#)), all served in some useful way the work of the body ([Eph. 4:12](#)). Within this ministering fellowship, as followers of their Lord, they helped each other grow and mature in 'the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ' ([Eph. 4:13](#)). p. 18

It was like a loving family. God was their Father ([Rom. 3:15](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)), and as His sons and daughters ([II Cor. 6:18](#); [Gal. 3:26](#)), they shared equally the inheritance of Christ ([Rom. 8:17](#)). Quite appropriately, then, members addressed each other as 'brother' and referred to themselves as 'brethren.'² Such love among themselves, a quality derived from their Lord, became the seal of their witness to the world.³ Christ had said: 'By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another' ([John 13:34](#), [35](#)).

UNITY IN DIVERSITY

Complementing this love was a spirit of unity within the body (cf. [John 17:21-23](#)). The church in Jerusalem, numbering into the thousands, was 'of one heart and soul' ([4:32](#)), a beautiful description of their solidarity. Again and again this community was said to be 'with one accord' ([2:46](#); [4:24](#); [5:12](#), [15:25](#)). That they came to this unity of heart and mind in the meeting preceding Pentecost would indicate that unity provides a fertile soil for the Spirit of God to work ([1:14](#); [2:1](#)).

However, as the church expanded, their unity was threatened by internal division between the Hebrew Christians and new Gentile believers.⁴ Some Judaizers insisted that all Gentile converts must adhere to their Jewish customs, particularly circumcision. It was not an easy problem to work through, even after God decisively intervened to get Peter and Cornelius together, and confirmed their meetings by pouring out His Spirit upon them

¹ The description of the church as the functioning 'body' of Christ appears repeatedly in the New Testament. It is a figurative or metaphorical expression, and not to be interpreted literally as an extension of Christ's incarnation. An excellent discussion of the church in this image is by Stan Cole, *The Body of Christ* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1964). For a helpful treatment of other biblical figures used for the church, see Paul Minear, *Images of the Church in the New Testament* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970). More than 80 images are cited, though the focus is on the concepts of the body of Christ, people of God, the new Creation, and fellowship in faith. A more limited study, ably summarized, is by Robert L. Saucy, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-56.

² This term is used more than 40 times in Acts alone. It describes persons that share a common heritage, like citizens of the same country, though it carries the additional force of brethren born of the same Spirit when applied to Christians. Note [1:16](#); [6:3](#); [9:17](#); [10:23](#); [11:1](#), [12](#), [29](#); [12:17](#); [14:2](#); [15:1](#), [3](#), [23](#), [32](#), [33](#), [36](#), [40](#); [16:2](#), [40](#); [17:6](#), [10](#), [14](#); [18:18](#), [27](#); [20:32](#); [21:7](#), [17](#), [20](#); [22:13](#); [28:14](#), [15](#), [17](#), [21](#), and others. The word also appears all through the letters of Paul and the General Epistles.

³ Gene A. Getz notes that this loving concern for one another is a concept that appears over fifty times in the Epistles alone, often in relation to church body life, e.g., [Rom. 12:10](#), [16](#); [13:8](#); [14:13](#), [10](#); [15:5](#), [7](#), [14](#); [1Cor. 12:25](#); [Gal. 5:13](#); [6:2](#); [Eph. 1:15](#); [4:1](#), [2](#), [32](#); [5:18-21](#); [Col. 1:3](#), [4](#); [3:9](#), [12](#), [13](#), [16](#); [1Thess. 3:12](#); [4:18](#); [Heb. 3:13](#); [10:23-25](#); [James 4:11](#); [5:9](#), [16](#); [1Peter 1:22](#); [4:9](#); [5:5](#); [1John 3:11](#), [23](#); [4:7](#), [11](#), [12](#); [II John 5](#). *Sharpening the Focus of the Church* (Chicago: Moody, 1974), pp. 115-116.

⁴ It is well to note that the church grew up in a Jewish system where already there was tension between contending factions, such as the Pharisees, Sadducees, Essenes and Zealots. Each of these groups had their own distinctive cultural and theological emphases, though they shared a basic faith. So the rise of the Judaistic spirit in the church was no reason to break fellowship with the Gentile Christians. Jews had already learned to live together amid diversity.

([10:1-48](#)). The legalists still were not satisfied, notwithstanding the evidence of God's direction ([11:1-18](#)). p. 19 The issue came up again at the Jerusalem Council, where after rehearsing the previous events, all agreed that the church should not impose Jewish rites upon the Gentile Christians ([15:1-29](#)). Grace prevailed. Facing this question early in the life of the movement opened the way for the evangelization of the whole world. Had the narrow Judaizers won the day, Christianity would have become an ethnic rather than a universal faith.⁵

Not only was it recognized that God made 'no distinction' between Jew and Gentile ([15:9](#); cf. [Eph. 2:14-18](#)), but in the larger dimension of fellowship, every other artificial barrier to unity was broken down, whether of race, national origin, social and economic position, language or sex. In the family of God, there was no Greek or barbarian, rich or poor, slave or free, male or female, but all were one in Christ ([Col. 3:10, 11](#); [Gal. 3:28](#)).

INTERNAL TENSIONS

This is not to imply that all was peaceful within the church. The Acts is careful to record continual problems coming up in the community. Early they had to deal with hypocritical members ([5:1-11](#)). As believers multiplied in Jerusalem, some Grecian Jews murmured because their widows were not receiving a fair distribution of provisions, a crisis which required swift administrative action ([6:1-6](#)). Then there were the tensions occasioned by lack of understanding and forgiveness, as seen in the hesitancy of the church immediately to accept Paul into the fellowship after his conversion ([9:26](#)). Though Barnabas resolved the problem ([9:27](#)), it did not prevent friction from developing later between Paul and John Mark ([13:13](#)), nor contention even with Barnabas in the way Paul handled the situation ([15:36-40](#)).⁶

Paul's letters also mention internal strife in the churches, of which the Corinthian congregation seems most negligent. A member of that fellowship was living in open immorality. Others were taking each other to court over petty disputes. Disorders were occurring in the p. 20 worship services. There were doctrinal differences, and a tendency for people to take sides around charismatic personalities. His letters reveal power struggles in other churches, including his own role of leadership. There are warnings against false teaching, as well as synthesizing Christian and pagan customs. The General Epistles of James, Peter and John indicate many of the same difficulties, as also the descriptions of the seven churches of Asia Minor recorded in the Book of Revelation.

Clearly churches, even growing, vibrant congregations, have problems, if nothing else, just the sheer logistic pressure occasioned by a rapidly expanding fellowship precipitates tensions. When limited knowledge and spiritual immaturity are added to this, conditions always with us, we can understand why problems constantly need resolution in the church. The issues need to be honestly faced, and dealt with. To ignore them invites disaster. But to meet them in the sufficiency of God's grace makes the difficulties stepping stones to progress. Essential to the reconciling process, however, is the mutual concern of the church where problems can be addressed in a context of love.

⁵ As a matter of historical interest, the Judaizers continued to maintain their position, and create tension in the church. Paul's letter to the Galatians, and to a lesser extent, Romans, speaks to the issues in this controversy. According to Eusebius, in 66 AD they left the Jerusalem church, and went to Pella, where, removed from society, they followed their Jewish way of life. The community lost an evangelistic thrust, and eventually faded away into oblivion. See Eusebius, *The Ecclesiastical History*, Vol. I (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1926), p. 201.

⁶ A good discussion of these internal problems in Acts may be found in C. E. Autrey, *op. cit.*, pp. 43-56.

MUTUAL SUPPORT

This willingness to bear one another's burdens is seen in their care of members with physical needs. It was like a family, where each person felt responsibility for the others. 'All that believed were together, and had all things common' (2:44). 'Not one of them said that ought of the things which he possessed was his own' (4:32). To provide for those without the basic necessities of life, persons with means, like Barnabas, 'sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all, according as any man had need' (2:45; cf., 4:34-37). The apostles distributed the provisions in an orderly manner, so that no one among them lacked (4:34; cf. 6:1).⁷

This generous giving to brethren in need is noted again when the disciples at Antioch, 'every man according to his ability,' sent relief to the famine stricken community in Judea (11:27-30). Paul, too, is a recipient of offerings from the churches concerned for his welfare (Phil. 4:15, 16). Mention also is made in his second letter to the p. 21 Corinthians of the Macedonian churches being allowed to give money to the Jerusalem saints, even out of extreme poverty (II Cor. 8:1-4).

Let it be stressed, however, that nothing in the common life of the church is compatible to practice of materialistic socialism today. State communism is a legislated and forced sharing, imposed from the top down. By contrast, the apostolic church sees sharing as an individual choice, a consequence of love and self-denial, which comes from the bottom up. It was a spontaneous act of worship, giving as unto the Lord.

CORPORATE MEETINGS

The closeness of the church at Pentecost set the pattern. 'They continued steadfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers' (2:42). Emphasis is upon a constancy of faith and devotion as they meet regularly for instruction, sharing of experiences and worship.⁸

Specific information about the format of these meetings is not given, though it seems apparent that it was very simple. There was a time for reading the Scriptures (2:42; 15:21, 30, 31; Col. 4:16; 1 Thess. 5:27), and perhaps a sermon or exhortation, as was the custom in the synagogue (cf. 20:7, 17, 18). Of course, these meetings allowed for corporate prayer (1:14; 2:42; 4:24, 31; 12:5, 12; Rom. 12:10, 13; 1 Thess. 5:14-18; James 5:13-16). From allusions to hymns and praise in the church, singing, also, seems to have been a part of the service (2:47; Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16). In these spiritual songs the members edified each other while also expressing their love to God out of thankful hearts.

Normally, too, a fellowship meal, called the 'agape' or 'love feast' was observed, recalling the Last Supper of Christ with His disciples (2:42, 46; 20:7; 1 Cor. 10:16, 17). This practice led to abuses at Corinth, with some unworthy members using the meal for their own pleasure by overeating, a situation which Paul strongly reproved (1 Cor. 11:27-34).

⁷ The need for assistance was especially acute in this early period of the Jerusalem church, where Jewish believers were ostracized from society, which deprived many of their economic support. The pressure was somewhat diminished as Christians moved out into the Gentile world.

⁸ The purpose of this study is not served by elaborating on the forms meetings took in the early church. Those who may be interested in pursuing this subject will find helpful the books by Oscar Cullman, *Early Christian Worship* (Naperville: Allenson, 1953); Alexander R. Hay, *The New Testament Order for the Church and Mission* (Audubon: New Testament Missionary Union, 1947); Maurice Goguel, *The Primitive Church* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1963); and Ralph P. Martin, *Worship in the Early Church* (Westwood: Flemming H. Revell, 1964). A shorter treatment is in Gary Inrig, *life in His Body* (Wheaton: Harold Shaw, 1975), esp. pp. 66-100.

Properly observed, however, the sharing of their food [p. 22](#) and drink in remembrance of the Lord's passion was a beautiful experience of holy communion.⁹

Throughout the meeting ample opportunity seems to have been given for personal participation. Each believer was free to exercise his or her spiritual gift, ask questions, and share any concern, as the Spirit might lead. Officers in the local fellowship doubtless provided some direction to the service, but the worshippers were not dependent on them.

Worship patterns gradually become more stereotyped toward the close of the first century. The same trend was apparent in the development of catechisms and creeds, as well as the communion meal, which took a more sacramental character. This is not to disparage formality, nor belittle the need for defining doctrine, for an increasingly complex body must have some stabilizing order. But in the formalizing process we must preserve the fellowship which gives heart to the structure.

GATHERING PLACES

During this early period the Christians did not have church buildings in which to meet. Those living in Jerusalem would gather in the temple area, especially at times of prayer ([2:56](#); [3:1](#); [5:12](#), [21](#), [42](#)), but this became difficult as Jewish opposition increased. The same pertained to the use of synagogues in other cities. Sometimes the Christians would assemble in the public halls that were available to them, as in 'the upper chamber' at Troas ([20:8](#)), but the use of such facilities does not appear to be a pattern.

Their normal place of meeting was in the home. The first gathering was in the upper chamber in the house of Mary, the mother of John Mark, which became a familiar prayer site for the brethren ([1:13](#); [12:12](#)). With the large increase of members many houses in the city became meeting places for church groups ([2:46](#)). The home of Phillip in Caesarea is mentioned as a rendezvous for the saints ([21:8](#)). A [p. 23](#) church met in the house of Philemon ([Philemon 2](#)). Jason's house in Thessalonica served the same purpose ([17:5](#)). At Corinth both the Houses of Titus, Justus and Stephanas were used as centres of fellowship ([18:7](#); [1 Cor. 1:16](#)). So also the house of Lydia and the jailer in Philippi ([16:15](#), [32-34](#)), and Nympha at Laodicea ([Col. 4:15](#)). Wherever Aquila and Priscilla move, it appears, too, that their house becomes a church site at Corinth, Ephesus and Rome ([18:26](#); [II Tim. 4:19](#); [I Cor. 16:19](#); [Rom. 16:5](#)).

One has to ask in all honesty why the Christians did not erect special buildings for their corporate meetings, especially after leaving the synagogues. Not until near the end of the second century is there any record of a church edifice being constructed.¹⁰ This stands in marked contrast to the other religions of the time. Granted, permission to build may have

⁹ The common meal continued to be observed in the church for several centuries, though the practice gradually decayed, due largely to mixing the Christian purpose with worldly elements. It should be kept in mind, too, that while the table fellowship provided a relaxed setting for the Eucharist instituted by Christ, the meal was not a necessary part of the observance, which centred in the partaking of the bread and the cup ([I Cor. 11:23-26](#)). A good discussion of this whole practice is by J. F. Keating, *The Agape and the Eucharist in the Early Church* (New York: AMS Press, 1969). Also helpful is the succinct work of Dom Gregory Dix, *The Shape of the Liturgy* (London: Dacre Press, 1945), pp. 48-102.

¹⁰ To my knowledge, the earliest known church building was in Dura-Europos on the River Euphrates, where a house dating from AD 232 was adapted to make a larger assembly hall for worship. More recent discoveries have led some authorities to believe an even earlier church edifice may have existed at Capernaum, perhaps in what was once the house of Peter. Interestingly, in both of these instances, the building seems to have been a renovated home. Colin J. Hemer, 'Archaeological Light on Earliest Christianity,' *The History of Christianity*, ed. by Tim Dowley (Herts, England: Lion Publishing, 1977), p. 58; cf. Michael Green, *op. cit.* p. 194.

been difficult to obtain in the hostile environment, though there were doubtless ways this problem could have been surmounted, at least, in friendly areas of the Empire. Perhaps, too, costly building programmes would have been hard to finance with their limited resources. But it seems also probable that the Christians simply saw no compelling reason to erect buildings for worship. They were able to get along quite well without them.

Could there be a more natural setting for the Christian family to meet? It was at home where they lived their faith every day. In this relaxed atmosphere they learned together even as they shared one another's burdens. What better place could there be for the people of God to experience the closeness of their love.

PERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS

The fellowship fostered in the church meetings was even more obvious in the daily relationships of Christians on the personal level. Reading the Acts one gets the impression that the Christians just enjoyed doing things together. In these casual relationships, probably more than in their gathered meetings, they learned what it meant to follow Christ in the daily routine of life. **P. 24**

Much of this fellowship centred in home visitation ([5:42](#)). For example, attention is called to Peter's visit with Simon at Joppa, an occasion doubtless used to strengthen the tanner's faith ([9:43](#); [10:6](#)). The practice frequently comes out in Paul's ministry, as he receives the hospitality of friends. In his case, not having a settled parsonage, it was a providential way for him to have his needs met while also ministering to the needs of others.

His stay with Lydia and her family after their conversions is characteristic. Not only did Paul and Silas accept her invitation to abide in her house ([16:15](#)), but they returned later for a visit following their release from prison ([16:40](#)). In the interval, after the conversion of the Philippian jailer, they stayed in his house, where the whole family came to Christ ([16:34](#)).

These visits with the brethren often were for extended periods. Sometimes for a few days ([20:6, 7](#); [21:4, 7, 8, 10](#); [27:3](#); [28:4](#); [13:14](#)); at other times they lasted for many months. At Corinth he lived with Aquila and Priscilla for more than a year and a half ([18:3](#)), establishing them in the faith, while also teaching the disciples meeting in Jason's house ([18:3, 7, 8, 11, 18, 19](#)). Altogether Paul stayed with the Ephesian church three years ([20:31](#)); and nearly that long during his confinement in Rome, where Christians regularly came to visit him ([28:30](#)). The spiritual life of the Christian community clearly is interwoven with their continuous interpersonal association.

TRAVELLING TOGETHER

Periods of travel were no interruption to fellowship. On his trip to Caesarea, we are told that Peter was accompanied by some of the Joppa Christians, along with the three men who had come to seek him ([10:23, 45](#); [11:12](#)). Likewise Paul, when persecution became intolerable in Damascus, was escorted by Barnabas to Jerusalem ([9:27](#)), then taken by the brethren to Caesarea ([9:30](#)). Later Barnabas brought him back to Antioch ([11:26](#)).

Moving about was a team exercise. As the narrative unfolds, the focus is upon the journeys of Paul, and his companions. But the principle of travelling together pertained to all the others, like Barnabas and Mark, Silas and Timothy, and Timothy and Erastus. Frequently, too, local brethren would join them (e.g. [21:15, 16](#)). No less than seven disciples were with Paul on his trip through Macedonia, making it a mobile school

(20:4).¹¹ Even when Paul was a p. 25 prisoner in transit to Rome, he was able to have Aristarchus and Luke go with him (27:2-8; 28:1, 10-15). When finally they reached the city of Caesar, brethren from the church came out to meet them, and they walked into town together (28:15).

There was safety in numbers, of course. Marauding robbers along the road made travelling in companies necessary for protection. But more importantly, it facilitated fellowship in a natural setting. By teacher and pupil being together, they were continually able to learn in the real laboratory of the world. Whatever happened along the way presented an occasion for teaching and reflection. Though unassuming, it was a powerful experience of discipleship.

FOLLOW UP OF BELIEVERS

As can be observed, all the way through there was a special effort to bring new Christians without delay into close relationships with other believers, both on the corporate and personal level. This was the way their growth was sustained. The three thousand converts at Pentecost were immediately amalgamated into the church life, and this pattern continued daily with others as they were being saved (2:46, 47; 4:32). When the lame man is healed at the Temple gate, Peter and John keep him with them as they continue their ministry (3:8; 4:14). With this same astuteness the apostles in Jerusalem quickly dispatched Peter and John to the Samaritan believers when they heard that 'Samaria had received the word of God' (8:14-25). Similar nurture was given by Peter to the household of Cornelius following their reception of the Holy Spirit (10:48).

The emphasis given to Paul's follow-up after his conversion certainly underscores this need. Not only is he taken into a fellowship of disciples at Damascus, but he is joined by a man sent by God to give special instruction (9:8-19, 25). When taken later to Jerusalem, he remained with the apostles for a period of time 'going in and going out' among them (9:28). Doubtless Paul learned more during these days than just getting to know the leaders; he learned an indispensable lesson in the care of new believers. For the rest of his life he made it a policy to stay with beginning disciples. He understood their need for p. 26 personal follow-up, a desire which apparently they also felt, for believers sometimes 'clave' to him (17:34), and 'followed' him home wanting to learn more of Christ (e.g. 13:43).

As they matured in the faith, he continued to relate to them as much as possible. Again and again he would go back to visit them, actually planning his missionary trips so that he could retrace much of the territory covered before. In these return calls he would meet with the church, 'confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith' (14:21, 22). He was particularly anxious after each mission to spend time with the Christians at Antioch, where having served on the church staff, he must have developed some deep roots along with a sense of accountability (13:1-4; 14:27-28; 15:30-35; 18:22).

When circumstances were such that he could not give the personal attention desired, he often arranged for others to take his place. Silas and Timothy, for example, were left behind at Berea when he had to leave (17:14); and Timothy and Erastus were sent into

¹¹ These men came from different areas of the world: Sopater from Berea; Aristarchus and Secundus from Thessalonica; Gaius and Timothy from Derbe; and Tychicus and Trophimus from Asia. The special reference to their diverse homelands suggests that their inclusion in the company had significance in the development of the church. Probably they were training for leadership roles.

Macedonia in response to their urgent request since he could not go himself ([19:22](#)). Such missions are alluded to repeatedly in his letters.

It is clear that in his deepening relationships Paul was conscious of a priority in spending time with persons training for leadership in the church. Hence much of his travels are in association with these maturing disciples. For example, Paul developed a close friendship with Priscilla and Aquila with whom he stayed at Corinth ([18:2, 3](#)). There was a natural interest between them, in that they were fellow tentmakers. But more than that, they had a heart for God ([Rom. 16:3](#)). His hosts learned well, for when later Paul departed for Ephesus, taking with him this lovely couple, they did the same thing Paul had done with them—found a disciple, got with him, and patiently helped him know ‘the way of God more accurately’ ([18:19–26](#)). It wasn’t long before Apollos, in turn, went forth preaching Christ, and helping others to grow in grace ([18:27, 28](#)).

The letters of Paul reflect a personal concern for these growing leaders. Some sixty or more persons are mentioned by name in the epistles. They are referred to as ‘friends,’ ‘partners,’ ‘fellow workers,’ ‘teammates,’ ‘faithful helpers,’ those who laboured ‘side by side’ with him. Obviously he had developed very close relationships with many of the brethren.

His farewell message to the elders of Ephesus, much like that of his follow-up letters, reflects this burden he carried for their development. Calling to mind how he was with them ‘all the time,’ he mentioned that he had faithfully taught them ‘publicly and from house to house’ [p. 27](#) everything that was profitable ([20:18, 20](#)). Nothing was withheld, as he ‘ceased not to admonish’ them ‘night and day with tears’ ([20:31](#)). This is the concern of a loving father zealous that his children in the faith attain to the full stature of Christ. The elders knew that his love for them was real, for when he had spoken, and prayed with them, ‘they all wept sore, and fell on Paul’s neck and kissed him,’ knowing that they would see his face no more ([20:36–38](#)).

A LEARNING FELLOWSHIP

This relationship provided the environment for their training. The apostolic church did not erect colleges or theological seminaries, nor even set up educational seminars. They had instruction in the tenets of the Christian faith and life, but not in formal classes or institutional programmes. To mold the life of their members, they simply got learners and teachers together in natural settings where they lived and worked every day.

Nothing was new in this approach. The church as the body of Christ was following the same approach to education as their Lord had used with His disciples. It is the principle of the family, by which most of our basic values are learned in this life. That is why all of us still reflect influences exerted upon us by our parents and other family members, especially in the formative years of early childhood.

Any effective method of education must incorporate this dynamic. It has been said that a college is a professor on one end of a log, and a student on the other end. This may be an over-simplification, but the point cannot be missed. When all is said and done, our education will not be much better than our teachers, nor the opportunity to learn much more than the way the teacher and student can be together.

This is what the apostolic church was doing in their development of disciples. In their community life, there was an atmosphere conducive to growth. Questions could be asked and issues clarified without intimidation. There was mutual trust. Whether in organized group meetings or informal friendly fellowship, the church was translating theory into practice. To a remarkable degree, truth was demonstrated in real life. What they said and did was an object lesson in reality.

Nowhere was this more pronounced than in the beginning steps of persons just coming to Christ. These spiritual babes were immediately surrounded with love, and made to feel a part of the family circle. No one could feel left out. Here was a community in which they all shared the bonds of an everlasting covenant. [p. 28](#)

APPLICATION TODAY

The implications of this upon the life of the church today dare not be missed. In our stress upon carefully ordered public services and organized campaigns, we may overlook the basic apostolic ingredient of fellowship. Times have become more complex with the passing centuries, to be sure, but the principle of association never changes.

However structured, we must relate closely with each other. There are ways this can be encouraged in the regular worship services, even in formal sacramental settings. Auxiliary meetings offer other opportunities for fellowship, especially in small group gatherings. In this connection, the Sunday School provides many options. Emphasis must be given to the home and family in the programme. And through it all, personal relationships need continual cultivation in the ongoing discipling process.

This is crucial in helping new believers get established. In their first steps of faith, they are particularly vulnerable to doubts and temptations, and need someone with them to give counsel. How fortunate it is when this person can be a more mature Christian with whom they already have some identity. That the church has often neglected such guardian care explains why so many converts fall away, or at least, never seem to grow in the likeness of their Lord.

Maturing in Christ takes time. There is no way that children can be raised in a hurry. To try to get it over quickly can lead only to frustration. The hectic way that churches have tried to force this into a few weeks of confirmation classes, if at all, is entirely inadequate. Disciples must have devoted Christian friends to follow, and the only way this can be facilitated is by being together over a period of time.

The church in Acts can teach us much about living as the body of Christ. If we would learn by their example, the Great Commission can become for us, as it was with them, the pattern of the church.

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Evangelicals and Biblical Inspiration

Kern R. Trembath

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Dr. Trembath has recently completed a doctoral dissertation on 'Evangelical theories on Biblical Inspiration: a review and proposal' at the University of Notre Dame and the following is his summary of the research: Approving the tripartite conception of inspiration (involving God as the initiative agent, the Bible as the inspired agent and believers as the