

Fellowship International

The International Partnership of Fundamental Baptist Missions(IPFBM) was born out of a desire to expand the fellowship of believers beyond our local churches to the world in a very personal and hands-on way. The Partnership has a singular goal: to assist associations of churches, local churches, and other ministries to realize the fellowship Paul writes about in Philippians.

The Greek word translated fellowship here is *koinonia* meaning partnership, literally, participation and comes from the word *koinos* meaning common. A related noun *koinonos* means a sharer, associate, companion, partner. The bottom line: fellowship cannot exist apart from relationships, and God's Word assumes that believers are in relationship with each other.

The Apostle Paul summarize biblical relationship using these words when he writes about his own relationship with the believers at Philippi in Philippians 1:3-7:

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; being confident of this very thing, that He who has begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ, even as it is righteous for me to think this of your all, because you have me in your heart, inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel, you are partakers of my grace.

In verse 5, Paul uses the Greek word *koinonia* which also carries the idea of "that which is the outcome of fellowship." This term is directly related to a later word in the passage: partakers. This word has the same root, *koinonia*, but with a prefix meaning with. The idea is that believers there participated with Paul, sharing in the experience of God's grace; thus he emphasizes the communion and commonality existing between himself and the Philippian believers. Paul says this communion is right because it is based on mutual love and commitment. This gave him great joy as he remembered these believers during his ministry.

The fact that the believers stood with Paul in the 'defense and confirmation of the gospel' was also a part of the spiritual communion or fellowship enjoyed between these believers. Not only was there a love relationship, but there was also a commitment by the believers at Philippi to stand with Paul in his verbal defense of the gospel before men and his goal of firmly establishing the power of the gospel in regions beyond their city.

A few verses later Paul comments further on the defense of the gospel when he discusses the problem of individuals preaching the gospel with improper motivations. In Philippians 1:16-17, we can hear Paul's heart in his words: The former preach Christ from selfish ambition, not sincerely supposing to add affliction to my chains, the latter out of love, knowing that I am appointed for the defense of the gospel. He wanted his dear friends to know how important their loving support was to him, that it was a source of strength.

Paul again uses the Greek word we have been considering, *sugkoinoneo*, in chapter 4:10-14. Here the word again has the prefix meaning with, so we can understand that he is talking about sharing with, partaking with, fellowshiping with.

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me has flourished again. Although you indeed did think, but you lacked opportunity. Not that I speak according to need, for I have learned to be content in whatever state I am. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound. In everything and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be

hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. Yet you did well in sharing my troubles.

He commends the believers for "sharing" in his anguish and persecutions. He comments in the previous verses that he learned the reality of true contentment regardless of his circumstances: hungry or full, abased, made low or abounding. He ends these comments concerning his trials by saying he had learned that it was through Christ he could be victorious, and in some way, the Philippian believers had entered into fellowship with him as part of this learning process.

Again Paul uses a word from the root *koinonia* in the next verses (4:15-19) where he says:

"Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as regards giving and receiving, except you alone. For even in Thessalonica you sent once and again to my necessity. I do not say this because I desire a gift, but I desire fruit that may abound to your account. But I have all, and abound,. I have been filled, having received of Epaphroditus the things which you sent, an odor of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable and well-pleasing to God.

Paul understood that the communion they, as believers, enjoyed was not founded or built on material needs and desires, but on the grace of God and the commonality of the power of the gospel. It was this power of the spiritual relationship which was the core value of Paul's relationship with the believers at Philippi, and it is the same spiritual relationship which forms the core value of the IPFBM .

What does this really mean in the life of the local church?

First, local church believers must develop strong spiritual relationships. Secondly, local churches must, like the Philippians did with the Macedonians, enter into the personal life and ministry of another local church. There should be an exchange of names, information , prayer requests and spiritual needs. Each partner would commit to pray diligently for the needs of the other and enter into the spiritual battles faced by the other partner. This fellowship is only possible as each partner works to understand the particular spiritual battles the other is facing from their cultural and social/political setting.

Fellowship is not just optional finger-food and conversation. It is a serious undertaking called a good work God has begun. The International Partnership of Fundamental Baptist Missions offers itself as a resource to facilitate biblical fellowship on a global scale.