

## Precious Fellowship

At a 1948 brothers meeting, Br. Henry Michel made a profound statement, “Not boasting, but we have the best thing in the world.” He was referring to the unique relationship we have among the brethren of the Apostolic Christian Church. This body of believers not only teaches the true Gospel of Jesus Christ whereby one may find a saving relationship with God, but also practices the teachings of Christ to love and assist each other where needed; what a Precious Fellowship! This is not an accident but the result of allowing God to work through the church from its early beginnings of the nineteenth century. Jesus set a perfect example.

Envision for a moment Jesus staying overnight at the home of Lazarus, Martha and Mary. After traveling on foot for hours, it must have been refreshing to spend time in sweet fellowship with those He loved. How close was He to them? After Lazarus died prematurely, Jesus wept when He saw where he was buried.

Again, we recall the time after Jesus’ death and resurrection; He appeared to two disciples on their way home to the town of Emmaus. He accepted the invitation to their home to refresh, share a meal and rest. What was their testimony after Jesus’ visit? “...Did not our hearts burn within us, while he talked with us by the way and while he opened to us the scriptures?” (Luke 24: 28-32)

The first congregation of believers in Jerusalem also provides a beautiful example of a precious fellowship. (Acts 2:41-47) They shared together and prayed together. Jesus was their common bond. As long as this bond existed, the church grew.

The above examples have been emulated, by and large, by the church in Europe, North America, and other parts of the globe. This precious fellowship has fostered the interaction between brothers and sisters, and congregations resulting in personal friendships and relationships. This is quite unique. Nothing compares to the experience of believers traveling to other cities, finding likeminded believers who open their hearts and homes for sweet fellowship in Christ. My work colleagues would marvel that I would often find fellow believers in my job-related travels to other cities. On a larger scale, church choirs travel hundreds of miles to another congregation to spend the weekend in worship and fellowship together. It brings this scripture to mind,

*“Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord; Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.” (Eph 5:19-20)*

This practice is not only a tremendous blessing, it is also essential. This is especially important for smaller and isolated fellowships that need the encouragement and strengthening of the body of Christ.

Other practices of this precious fellowship are the church camps and retreats. Individual members and families travel across country to be spiritually nurtured through bible classes, sermons, and presentations. To meet brothers and sisters we may not have seen for some time is always so precious and uplifting. Choirs for all age groups are a highlight of such meetings.

Related, four-part harmony singing has historically been a practice of our fellowship. First-time visitors to our worship services are in awe that our congregational singing ministers as one large choir.

Needless to say, there are costs and sacrifices involved, especially for larger families, who want to participate in these activities. Sacrifice of time for travel and visitation is a consideration. However, the blessings derived outweigh the material costs.

Anything of value requires effort to maintain and promote. Our Precious Fellowship is no exception. Local and national doctrinal unity, purity, and biblical practices, are everyone's responsibility, not only the elders or ministers. The apostle Paul exhorted the Ephesian believers,

*"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation wherewith you are called, with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as you are called in one hope of your calling; One Lord, one faith, one baptism, One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Eph 4:1-6)*

Regional and national brothers' meetings in the past have proven to bring much needed encouragement, sharing of concerns, and an opportunity to revisit and address doctrinal issues and practices. The more frequent these meetings are held, the less the chance for isolation, establishing of different practices, and deviations from the proven and established doctrine. In contrast, when our fellowship is no longer precious, believers often may seek for affiliation with other 'Christians'.

The question that we must address individually and collectively is, do we really appreciate our Precious Fellowship? If we do, then what can I do to enhance it? It behooves us to promote the gospel of Jesus Christ, which promises eternal life, and be well grounded in the word (Col. 2:6-7) including the Apostolic Christian Church's Statement of Faith. If we were asked what our fellowship believes, are we able to give a satisfactory answer? Scripture teaches us to be always ready to give an answer. (I Peter 3:15) How many of us know the history of our denomination? We would do well to teach our young people and newcomers about the struggles and challenges to the growth of the church of Christ. This would help them better understand the principles, teachings, and workings of the church.

Last but not least, we need to encourage each other with personal visitation for encouragement, sharing the word, discovering personal needs, and praying for one another. It proved effective in the early church. Unfortunately, today it seems that material prosperity has somewhat dampened the evangelistic spirit of the past, and we have become less dependant on God and each other.

God is faithful. He has used our Fellowship in the past to enhance the gospel, to assist the needy, and will continue to do so if we individually and collectively yield ourselves to Him and His purpose. I have personally experienced the outreach and vision of the church. After WWII, our family was barely surviving the aftermath of the war in communist East Germany. How grateful

we were to receive timely packages of used clothing and non-perishable food items. A bit of Crisco shortening on a slice of bread was so good. The Lord provided an eventual escape to West Germany. Fellow believers opened their hearts and homes to us in a wonderful way until, again, God provided an opportunity to immigrate to North America, where we were welcomed and assisted by fellow Christians. We shall always be grateful to God and His church.

Was Br. Henry Michel correct in his claim that we have the best thing in the world? Would he be able to proclaim the same today? He probably could not make that claim everywhere. Should we keep, nurture, and promote this precious fellowship of Christ? The answer is a resounding YES! The benefits and blessings are innumerable.