

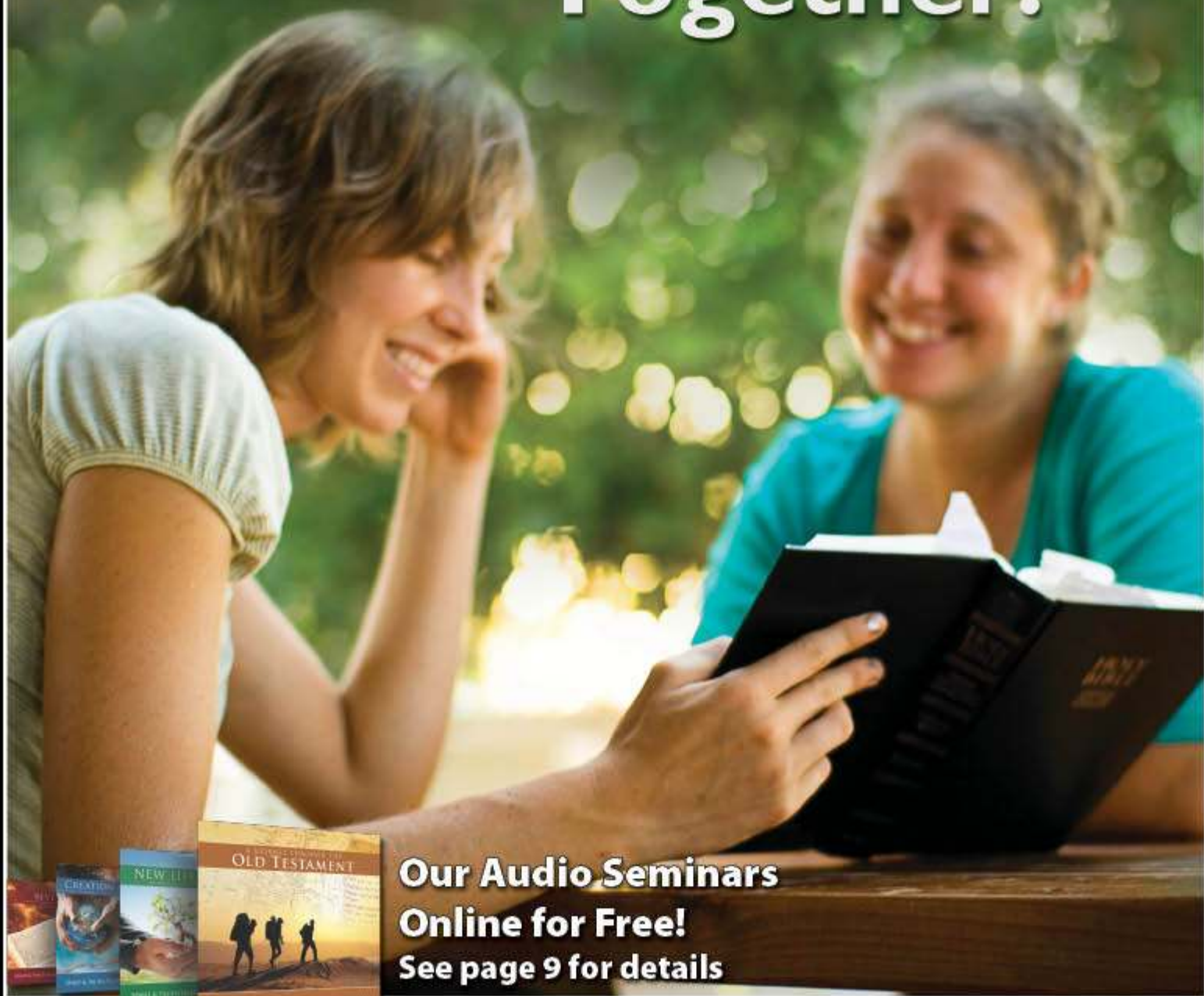
The "Church" is People | Fellowship: Intimate Joint-participation | Let's Meet Together for Good

THE SOWER

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Let's get Together!



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Opening Letter

Let's Get Together!

Spirit & Truth Fellowship is very committed to helping Christians fulfill God's directive to get together. For Christians, the acronym T.E.A.M., meaning "together everyone achieves more," is certainly true. God and the Lord Jesus never desire that anyone ever walk the path of their faith alone. The concept of us all being members of God's household, His spiritual family, and the One Body most definitely confirm this.

In this issue of *The Sower*, we examine God's instruction in Hebrews 10:25 to "...not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing..." There are many ways that God's people can be connected to one another, ranging from small meetings to large congregational events, and every kind of meeting in between.

Often Christians have thought in terms of church being the traditional Sunday gathering in the large church building on the corner. Yet, one of the most beautiful concepts the Lord gave us is his instruction that he is present wherever just two or more are gathered in his name. We refer to this concept as the "simple church" and with it we can explode wide open the possibilities of what "church" can be. All of a sudden church can include the gathering of friends in coffee shops, work or office places, prayer time with co-workers, modest home meetings, Bible studies, or prayer and praise meetings, as long as Jesus is the center and focus.

Our ministry theme for 2010 is *Building on the Firm Foundation*, and the practice of fellow Christians meeting together is certainly fundamental to any building we do individually or collectively. After all, it is in our meetings that we have the greatest opportunity to lead others to Christ and to disciple each other in his ways. Being with others is often how we get to practice our faith by living love, bearing with one another, forgiving one another, bearing one another's burdens, and proving our faith to be genuine. Through our meetings we can become grounded in the scriptures, learn the fundamentals of our faith, enjoy corporate worship, pray, and give generously.

As we move forward, let us all support one another by breaking any habits of not meeting, and instead resolve to get together regularly!

Thankful to be part of the family of God with you,

Dan Gallagher, John Schoenheit, Gary Theisen and Karen Theisen
Spirit & Truth Fellowship Board of Directors

Let's Get Together

by Dan Gallagher

I really look forward to getting together with people I love. I come from a large family with five sisters and two brothers, not to mention the countless aunts, uncles, nieces, nephews, and now the many, many in-laws. Gallagher family gatherings have become legendary as times of great joy and celebration. It is very easy for me to take God's admonition to His children to heart when He tells us we should be meeting together.

Hebrews 10:25a

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing,...

Unfortunately God's nemesis, His archenemy the Devil, is always trying to cause separation. In fact, division is one of the greatest tactics the Devil uses in his fight against God and His people. Sadly, the testimony of history is that he has been pretty effective in its use, which causes me to think that we must be tenacious in our efforts to be connected to each other.

One of the ways our Enemy pulls God's people apart is by getting them to shift their focus from the things of Yahweh to the things of the world. Throughout time men and women have been ablaze with the fire of revival, only to have their flames slowly wane because they get distracted by the pressures and pleasures of this world. God gives us numerous examples throughout the Old Testament of men and women who have been defeated because they turned their faces from God to seek idols. In Ecclesiastes 1:9, God says that "there is nothing new under the sun," and this is certainly the case when it comes to people separating and falling away from the path of righteousness. It should be no surprise then, since the Adversary is so energetic in his efforts to cause separation, that this is the polar opposite of what God wants us to do. God empathically tells us "not to give up meeting together," (Heb. 10:25).

When reading this exhortation in Hebrews the thought struck me, "What a sad testimony that these first-century saints not only were not meeting, but that *their not meeting* had actually become *their habit*." For a period of about ten years I became disillusioned with fellowshiping with other Christians. I had been disappointed in some Christian leaders, generally as a result of my own false expectations about them, and I allowed it to dampen my desire to be connected with others. I slowly pulled away from my Christian relationships, and as I did I became less passionate about the things of God. Then, one day I woke up after taking a hard look in the mirror and realized there was little difference between my actions and the ways of the world. I had become spiritually dull, insensitive to the ways of God, my hard heart was calcified, and I was far removed from the "living epistle" that I had once been. How did this all happen? After looking back on my steps and the path I walked, I realized one significant factor was my lack of Christian fellowship. Like the recipients of Hebrews, I too had gotten in the "habit of not meeting" with fellow Christians.

People often become desensitized to the massive amount of disconnection that is being promoted by the world. It used to be necessary that people interact socially with others in order to get things done. We used to have to talk to people to do our banking and shopping, whereas now all of these things can be done in isolation from others via the Internet. Sadly, one of the main consequences of the Devil's attack has been the shattering of the family. The Devil is relentless in his promotion of division, so we need to be even more diligent in our efforts to fight for connection with others.

Three Reasons Why We Should Meet

Since the fall of Adam in the Garden of Eden, the Adversary has opposed God's plans for mankind's redemption. His opposition continues as he attempts to thwart and stop the spread of the gospel, the good news

of Jesus Christ. From the first days of Christianity, people met with the purpose of spreading the gospel.

Acts 5:42

Day after day, in the temple courts and from house to house, they never stopped teaching and **proclaiming the good news that Jesus is the Christ.**

It is noteworthy that they “never stopped” proclaiming the message of Jesus being the Christ. This was their principle motivation and passion, and it should be ours too. Every Christian should have a burning desire to share his story with others about what Christ has done for him. Paul, despite being under house arrest, was faithfully promoting the gospel as he met with people in his rented home in Rome. His purpose for doing so is clearly stated in the close of the book of Acts.

Acts 28:30 and 31

(30) For two whole years Paul stayed there in his own rented house and welcomed all who came to see him.

(31) Boldly and without hindrance he **preached the kingdom of God and taught about the Lord Jesus Christ.**

Like Paul, our first-century brothers and sisters were passionate about telling others about the Lord and they met to spread the message of the good news. Some people will be more effective at evangelism than others, but anyone can invite someone to come to a meeting with other Christians. Spreading the good news about Christ is one of the fundamental reasons we should be meeting.

A second reason why we need to meet is to help raise people to spiritual maturity. Once a person has accepted Christ he needs time to grow and mature, learning his ways and practicing his newfound faith. Jesus commanded his disciples to “make disciples” (Matt. 28:19), which involves more than just bringing people to him. Making disciples involves teaching, mentoring, and raising people past the elementary truths of Christ so they can be weaned off the milk of the Word and onto the meat (1 Cor. 3:2, Heb. 5:12 and 13, 1 Pet. 2:2).

The birth of a baby can be a joyous occasion, but the point of birth is not to remain in infancy, but to grow up to be a responsible and independent adult capable of producing one’s own children. We seek new spiritual children but, beyond that, we desire to see God’s children grow up to their full potential, and that takes discipleship. The Christian author, Frank Viola, in his book, *Pagan Christianity: The Origins of Our Modern Church Practices*, describes two ways that Christian workers were trained in the first-century: living a shared life with a group of Christians, and learning the Lord’s work under the tutelage of an older, seasoned worker.¹

Having a “shared life” and being under the “tutelage” of an older, seasoned worker are functions that meeting together can fulfill. Meeting together gives us a place to serve others in a variety of ways and to grow in our giftings. All of our gifts and callings are to be used for the benefit of others, which requires that we “be with others.”

A third reason we should meet is because God has designed us for relationship and without it we are incomplete. I believe there is a hole in every man and woman’s heart that yearns for connection with others. It is only through our connection with others that we can be fulfilled because all our gifts and callings become of little value if they cannot benefit others. There is a great sense of personal satisfaction when we see how we benefit others through our acts of service.

We are all very vulnerable when we are alone and isolated. I learned through personal experience that isolation lulled me to sleep and set me up for a great deception. There truly is strength in numbers. When I am with others then they can lift me when I am down, and I can do the same for them. If I am blind in an area of my life then others can help me to see, and if I come under spiritual attack they can help to warn me and also to

fight for me. We must keep meeting together if we are to fight together.

Is There a Biblical Model for Meeting Together?

The book of Acts provides great insight into the spread of the gospel and how our first-century brethren operated. Of course, thousands of years have passed since then and there are many cultural differences between our modern times and theirs, but one thing we can be certain of is they met, and they did so wherever they could.

It would have been unthinkable in the first-century for a person to become a convert to Christianity and then not be connected to a local congregation. The local congregation was more than just a circle of religious friends. For thousands of years obtaining the simple necessities of life, such as getting water to your home, obtaining oil for your lamp, and even having food for the day, involved a full community cooperation. There was little separation between a person's family life, social life, and his religious life.

For many first-century Jews, one of the unfortunate consequences of accepting Christ was that it meant they were barred from their local synagogues. This did not just have religious ramifications. In many ways it had a serious impact on their very ability to provide for their life's needs, because there was an intertwining of every area of their life. Today, if I am not happy with a church or pastor, I can often leave and go join a new church. This is different than what most Christians through the ages have experienced. In years past, once someone was cut off from the synagogue or church they had to find others and band together. They needed to work cooperatively to provide for their daily needs as well as for their mutual protection.

Likewise, since the synagogue was no longer available for the first-century saints, they met in the places that were readily available to them. This is why the New Testament epistles often speak of them meeting in their homes.

Romans 16:3-5

Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them. Greet also **the church that meets at their house.**

1 Corinthians 16:19

The churches in the province of Asia send you greetings. Aquila and Priscilla greet you warmly in the Lord, and so does **the church that meets at their house.**

Philemon 1 and 2

Paul, a prisoner of Christ Jesus, and Timothy our brother, To Philemon our dear friend and fellow worker, to Apphia our sister, to Archippus our fellow soldier and to the church that meets in your home:

Colossians 4:15

Give my greetings to the brothers at Laodicea, and to Nympha and **the church in her house.**

Christianity was a spiritual movement that, unlike the majority of the world religions, did not begin with any sacred buildings or objects. This was a grassroots spiritual movement where people met wherever they could with a focus primarily on one thing, spreading the good news of Jesus being the Christ. With this as their goal, they met on the roadsides (Acts 8:26), at public gateways into the temple area (Acts 3:1), in the temple courtyards (Acts 3:11 and 5:12), in the home of a Roman centurion (Acts 10 and 11), on the side of a river (Acts 16), and in rented buildings (Acts 19:9). The point God seems to be making is that it does not matter how we meet, but rather that we meet.

What Caused Christian Meetings to Move Out of the Home?

Many people today equate involvement in Christianity with “going to church,” the large religious building on the corner where followers of Christ meet every Sunday morning. What happened to cause Christianity to disconnect from its grassroots simplicity? A large part of the answer is that soon after the emperor Constantine converted to Christianity a very profound series of events was set in motion. Around 324 A.D., Constantine ordered the construction of church buildings throughout the Roman Empire. The churches he built followed the general construction plans of pagan temples, which had raised platforms, altars, high vaulted ceilings, etc. In many cases, pagan temples were even merely stripped of their pagan gods and then converted for Christian worship. In addition to the construction of churches, Constantine also established the clergy class, separating the priests from the people. He also merged the civil and ecclesiastical governance into one body, and made many other changes that had a great cultural impact on the way Christians worshipped and conducted themselves. One of the most significant impacts was the loss of the “simple church,” because it was replaced by these new buildings we now call “churches.”

Small or Large Meetings: Where Should We Go from Here?

As I stated previously, I do not believe God cares where we meet, but rather that we do meet. We are free to utilize a broad range of meeting styles rather than being restrained by any one model. There are advantages and disadvantages to every meeting style, so what we do should employ the best meeting format for our needs and purposes.

Most Christians now recognize the great value in the meeting format that can be conducted in the home. This type of meeting is frequently referred to as the Simple Church because it is relatively easy to do since it does not require a special building or elaborate preparation. The simple meeting also allows for greater participation and mutual service by the members. On the other hand, any home church is limited in its resources and abilities merely because of its small size.

On the other end of the spectrum is the larger congregation that generally meets in the traditional church building. Some have referred to this as the “Legacy Church” model, and it too can be very effective. By its nature, the large numbers of people with differing gifts means there are a great number of ways for people to serve and to be served. I love the feeling of praising God in the large congregational settings where my voice becomes one of a thousand others. The large congregation also enables people to pool their resources and provide for such things as parochial schooling, evangelistic outreach programs, homeless shelters, etc. Yet despite those advantages, the larger setting also has some drawbacks. Organizationally they tend to put a lot of focus on a few individuals who do most of the work while the rest of the members become spectators. The “spectator mentality” that can creep into Christianity can cause people to think they have done their Christian service by just showing up once a week for church and giving their financial offering.

Christianity is not a spectator event. We are all members in particular with individual gifts and callings, all of which need to be in action and service to others (Eph. 3:6, 4:25 and 5:30; Col. 3:15). There are over thirty places in the New Testament where the phrase “one another” is used.² We are called to love one another (Rom. 13:8), to encourage one another (Heb. 3:13 and 10:25), and to be devoted to one another (Rom. 10:12). It is impossible to follow any of these commands of God if we are not with one another. Again the point is not how we meet, or where we meet, or even when we should meet, but that we do meet.

Get Connected

As we have seen, there is great value in both small meetings and large ones. Actually, we all need both, and the optimum situation for any meeting is to make the meeting style fit the goals that we are trying to accomplish, as determined by the needs of the people. We need each other, and God needs us to fulfill our calling as His ambassadors, so let’s not let the Adversary succeed at isolating us. Rather, let’s be diligent to get together with other Christians.

Notes:

1. Frank Viola, Pagan Christianity, *The Origins of Modern Church Practices* (Present Testimony Ministry, Gainesville, FL, 2002), pp. 247-248.
2. See a list of the “One Anothers” at TruthOrTradition.com/oneanother

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The Contender

The “Church” is People

by John W. Schoenheit

Many verses in the New Testament speak of the “church,” so it is important to understand what “church” means. The first definition of “church” in modern English dictionaries is something like, “a building for Christian worship,” and it is only the second or third definition that says something like, “a body of Christians,” or “the collective body of Christians.” In the Bible, however, the word “church” never refers to a building, but always to people; specific groups of people.

The origin of God calling out, and working through, a specific group of people started in the Old Testament. By the time Israel left Egypt it was a mighty nation, and God, who had earlier said He would work with the descendants of Abraham, called the nation of Israel out from among the other nations on earth. He chose Israel to be the people through whom He would bring the Messiah, saying:

Exodus 19:5 and 6

(5) Now if you obey me fully and keep my covenant, then out of all nations you will be my treasured possession. Although the whole earth is mine,
(6) you will be for me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation....

We need to pay special attention to the fact that God said Israel would be a “holy” nation, because “holy” means “set apart,” and God did set Israel apart for Himself out of all the nations on earth. God confirmed again and again that the Israelites were a special and holy people to Him (Deut. 4:37; 7:6; 14:2, 21; 26:19; 28:9; etc.).

One of the primary Hebrew words used to designate the people of Israel is *qahal* (Strong’s number 6951), and it is often translated “assembly.” For example, when God was speaking to Moses about signaling to the Israelites, He said, “To gather the assembly [*qahal*], blow the trumpets” (Num. 10:7).

When the Old Testament was translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt around 250 B.C., making the version we today call the Septuagint, the Hebrew word *qahal* was usually translated as *ekklēsia*. The Greek translators of the Septuagint did not coin the word *ekklēsia*, but instead used a word that was in common use. Louw and Nida write in their Greek-English lexicon:

The term *evklhsi,a* [*ekklēsia*] was in common usage for several hundred years before the Christian era and was used to refer to an assembly of persons constituted by well-defined membership. In general Greek usage it was normally a socio-political entity based upon citizenship in a city-state... In many contexts *evklhsi,a* may be readily rendered as ‘gathering of believers’ or ‘group of those who trust in Christ.’¹

The term *ekklēsia* occurs over 100 times in the New Testament and, as was pointed out earlier, it always refers to groups of people, never to the building where the people met. The word *ekklēsia* was used of many different groups, not just Christians. In the New Testament these groups include:

- Jews: Acts 7:38 (The Israelites in the wilderness; often translated “assembly,” but translated “church” in the KJV).
- Gentiles: Acts 19:32 (a gathering of Gentiles in Ephesus).

- The universal body of believers made up of Jews, Gentiles, and Christians. Jesus said, "...on this rock I will build my church" (Matt. 16:18), and in that context Jesus' "church," his "assembly" or "congregation," consists of every person who is saved. Many great people in the Old Testament were not Jews, people such as Ruth the Moabite and Uriah the Hittite, but they are saved and thus are part of Jesus' "church." Thus, in John 10:16 Jesus said to the Jews around him, "I have other sheep that are not of this sheep pen. I must bring them also. They too will listen to my voice, and there shall be one flock and one shepherd."
- The whole body of Christians: Acts 5:11; 20:28; 1 Corinthians 10:32.
- Christians in a local area or who met in a specific local place; a local assembly: Acts 14:23; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 4:17.

Some Bible translators recognize that translating *ekklēsia* as "church" can confuse new Christians, who would naturally think of the "church" as a building, and so they use "assembly" or "congregation" instead of "church" in their versions. Bible versions that use "assembly" include the translation done by Charles Darby, *Rotherham's Emphasized Bible*, and *Young's Literal Translation*. Versions that use "congregation" include *The Better Version of the New Testament* by Chester Estes and *The New English Bible*.

The impact of realizing that the "church" is people is simple but profound. Biblically, people do not "go to church," they *are* the church. The "church" meets wherever they gather. Thus, while we often think in terms of Christians meeting in "churches" (buildings), the biblical reality is that "churches" (assemblies; congregations) exist wherever Christians meet: in "church" buildings, houses, apartments, workplaces, parks, and more. Since the "church" is people, God's emphasis is not where we meet, but that we meet. The place that the "church" selects to meet should be a purposeful decision, based upon what the meeting is supposed to accomplish.

For personal growth, the small meeting in a house or apartment is often the best because everyone gets to pray, share, and participate. Participation usually means quick growth. Larger meetings are wonderful for general education and accomplishing tasks that small groups cannot easily accomplish, such as sponsoring an outside speaker or a conference, or having a band or choir. Also, just as small groups have more intimacy, large groups often have a level of collective excitement that is not present in smaller meetings.

Another point that we should clarify, especially in today's, "do it alone" culture, is that one Christian is not a "church." Today, with Christian radio, TV, Podcasts, YouTube, and much more, it can be easy to get a "good feeling" about God, or learn about Him, without personally meeting together with others. Paul paraphrased Christ's words, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35), and true Christianity is about giving. Not just giving money, or "things," but sharing our time and lives with others. Face to face church should be one of the mainstays of our Christian lives.

In closing, it is perhaps valuable to know why the word "church" came to be used in Christian circles if it refers to a building, but the Greek word from which it is translated in the New Testament never means a building. Although the word "church" developed over time from the Middle English, from Old English, from the Germanic, its ancient root is the Greek word *kuriakon*, meaning "belonging to the Lord" (from the word *kurios*, "lord"). Historians say that *kuriakon* was used of places of Christian worship from around the time of Constantine. This would make sense for a couple of reasons.

First, Constantine was the first Christian emperor of Rome, and he started a campaign of building places for worship ("church buildings"), which needed a general name that would set them apart from the other public

buildings he, as emperor, was building and also set them apart from the pagan temples in the Empire. Thus, *kuriakon*, or “belonging to the Lord” would have been a very appropriate general name for these buildings. It is easy to think of Greek speaking people talking of “going to the *kuriakon*.”

Second, by the time of Constantine much of the original revelation of the Apostle Paul had been lost. For the most part, the Sacred Secret, the use of the manifestations of holy spirit, salvation by faith, the priesthood of the believer, and many such doctrines had been lost. Replacing those were the “clergy” and a much more controlled and specific liturgy, which were available only in the *kuriakon* buildings. Thus, over the centuries, the institution of the “church” building replaced the biblical concept that the church was people. The Reformation re-established the doctrine of the priesthood of the believer, but from a practical standpoint the general teaching inside Christendom continued to be that people had to “go to church.” It was only in the latter part of the 1900’s that the house church movement really caught on, at which time doctrine taught, and practice confirmed, that people were indeed the “church.”

It can be wonderfully freeing to realize that there does not have to be a “church building” for our prayers, praise, and fellowship together to be somehow validated by God. When Christians, even groups of two or three, get together in Christ’s name to pray, sing, study, help and advise each other, or perform Christian acts of giving and charity, they are the “church,” and Jesus promised he would be among them (Matt. 18:20). From time to time we here at Spirit & Truth Fellowship hear from people who do not get together with other Christians because they say they “cannot find a church” where they fit in. While it is true that in some situations it can be difficult to find a large group of people who meet in a building with whom you can fellowship, it is rarely difficult to find one or two others to fellowship with in Christ’s name. “Church,” i.e., Christians meeting together, is vital if we are to have powerful Christian lives. We are the “church,” the assembly, the congregation, so let’s make sure we are assembling with other Christians.

Fellowship: Intimate Joint-participation

Fellowship is an important concept in the New Testament. The Greek word translated “fellowship” is *koinonia*, and it occurs in some very pivotal verses. Like many other Greek words, it has several meanings that overlap to some extent. *Koinonia* can refer to intimate participation and full sharing with others, such as in the verses that speak of our “fellowship” with Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 1:9; 10:16). It can refer to the sharing of our lives with one another (Gal. 2:9). It can also refer to sharing in a more limited sense, such as our sharing money or material goods with others (Rom. 15:26, “contribution”; 2 Cor. 9:13).

In this article we will limit our discussion to fellowship with God, Christ, and others. In that context, many lexicons define *koinonia* something like, “association with others that has close mutual relations and involvement.” The Internet encyclopedia “Wikipedia” adds the important word “intimate,” in its definition, reading, “communion by intimate participation.” Perhaps a very good definition would be, “intimate joint-participation.” The word “intimate” in this definition is important, because it brings in an aspect of personal openness that might otherwise be missed. Someone once defined “intimacy” as “in to me see,” which is accurate and clear. It is amazing the extent to which we can be with others and never let them see into us. Many people can talk for hours without ever letting the listener “see” into them. That may be wise to do “on the street,” but it is certainly not how fellowship, *koinonia*, is supposed to work among Christians.

Intimate joint-participation with others

As we just saw above, *koinonia* is intimate joint-participation. Interestingly, *koinonia* is never used in the New Testament to describe a meeting. That is in sharp contrast to the Christian Church today, because people of many denominational backgrounds say they are “going to fellowship,” when they mean they are “going to a meeting.” In fact, this modern definition of “fellowship” has become so prevalent it has made its way into some dictionaries.

It is easy to see how *koinonia*, intimate joint-participation, would become the name for the meeting where intimate joint-participation occurs. In biblical times a person might say, “I am going to fellowship—to intimately participate with others.” Today the definition has shifted and the person might say, “I am going to fellowship—the place where intimate participation occurs.” There is no fundamental problem with that linguistic development. There is a problem, however, with what came to be the next linguistic step, which was that “Fellowship” eventually became the name of the meeting even if “intimate joint-participation” did not occur. Thus in some circles, the concept of intimately and jointly participating with others was replaced by just going to a meeting, which often was more of a duty than a blessing.

God has called Christians to “fellowship” with each other; to fully and intimately participate in each other’s lives, and new Christians in the early Church were glad to do that.

Acts 2:42 (NASB)²

They were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.

Most of the Christians that Acts 2:42 refers to had a lot of learning and growing to do. They had been among the numbers of Jews who had rejected Jesus when he was among them, and they needed to shed many preconceived ideas about the Messiah and learn how to walk by the gift of holy spirit they received when they got born again. These Jews knew that the best way to learn and grow was to be part of a small group where they could listen intently, ask questions, dialogue with elders in the faith, share what they believed and get confirmation or correction about it, and learn how to go out into the world and be effective ambassadors for Christ.

One of the nice things about clearly understanding that “fellowship” is intimate joint-participation, or “full sharing,” is that we instantly know if we are doing it. If we arrive home from a Christian gathering and someone asks us if we had intimate joint-participation, we would not have to say, “I’m not really sure, I will have to think about it for awhile.” There is great profit and growth when we get to share with other Christians, who we are, what we believe, and what we plan to do for the Lord. Therefore, if we are not part of a group that allows us to actually “fellowship,” engage in intimate joint-participation, we should seek one out and become a part of it. Thankfully, Jesus told us that such a group does not have to be large.

Matthew 18:20

For where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them.

Although most of us like Christian meetings that are more than two or three people, if we take the time to think about it, sometimes our most intimate joint-participation takes place in small meetings. We know that Jesus must have had some wonderful times with just the twelve apostles, and if there are lots of people in a meeting it is hard to have genuine intimate communication. The home churches in Acts were the perfect size for intimate joint-participation, and that is surely one reason why first-century Christians seemed to grow so quickly in the faith.

Intimate joint-participation with God and Christ

One of the more subtle aspects of intimate joint-participation that occurs in the Christian faith happens between God, Jesus Christ, and each believer. The Bible assures us that fellowship with God and Christ are part of the Christian life.

1 John 1:3b

...And our fellowship [*koinonia*] is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ.

The spiritual life of the committed Christian should involve constant communication with God and Christ. In fact, if we could print out the daily communication between a committed Christian and God and Christ and read it, it might be quite revealing, possibly even humorous. We can talk to them, pray to them, express concerns, ask questions, bargain with them, make demands, and share with them our most intimate wishes and fears. We can also share with them exactly who we are and how we feel. True fellowship involves being in two-way communication where both parties are concerned about the mutual benefit of each other.

Although there will be times in the life of almost every committed Christian that God makes His presence known in an unmistakable way, much of the time God's actions in our lives are more like the "gentle whisper" that Elijah heard (1 Kings 19:12). Nevertheless, we can trust the Word of God when it says that God is at work in us both to want to do, and to do, His good pleasure. Unfortunately, a very important verse on this subject is not clear in many versions.

Philippians 2:13 (KJV)

For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of *his* good pleasure.

The specific use of "will" that appears in the KJV and many other versions is not common in our vernacular, so the verse becomes unclear. "Will" is a translation of the common Greek verb *thelō*, and it means "to want, to desire." *The New Living Testament* gets the sense of *thelō* very nicely:

Philippians 2:13 (NLT)³

For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.

Most people know that God works in their lives. But here is a verse that says that God works in us so we even want to do His will in the first place—it is God who is "giving you the desire." Also, the word "do" is the common Greek verb *energeō*, which means to work, act, or do. Both *thelō* and *energeō* are present tense, active voice, which means that the action is ongoing. God and Christ are always at work in us. They never leave us or forsake us. Thus, we might translate the verse: "for it is God who is continually working in you both to want to do, and to do, his good pleasure."

Talk about intimate joint-participation! God and Christ are always participating in our lives so we will want to do, and do, the will of God. Sometimes we refer to the gentle guidance of God in our lives as "the leading of the spirit." Christians trying to live their faith must strive to learn how to become quiet on the inside and work more and more in concert with God and Christ, enjoying the fellowship with them. In contrast, carnal Christians seek worldly pleasure by indulging the flesh, and thus are always fighting the influence of the spirit. Every Christian has to fight his flesh and sin nature, but we do not have to give in to it (Gal. 5:17). God and Christ are always influencing us to be godly, and our flesh and sin nature are always influencing us to gratify our sinful cravings. The wise Christian learns how to walk more and more in intimate joint-participation with Christ and not fulfill sinful cravings.

Conclusion

God knows that when Christians are deeply connected with Him and with other Christians on a heart level it is healing, rewarding, and empowering, so He made intimate joint-participation with Him and other Christians a foundational part of the Christian faith. Now each Christian has the joy and privilege of learning to tone down the influences of the flesh and to experience true fellowship with God and with Christ. When it comes to our relationships with other Christians, we have the blessing and freedom to seek out other Christians with whom we can truly "fellowship," that is, enter into intimate joint-participation that will enrich each of our lives, help our walk, and contribute to our walking before the Lord at our full potential. Let's not just "meet," let's "fellowship."

Let's Meet Together For Good

People are communal beings. Loneliness is a horrible feeling, and it is very disconcerting and uncomfortable to be isolated. This is so universally true that many people hide what they really believe or how they really feel about something just so they will be accepted in a group. There are studies that confirm that people who are connected with others are generally healthier and better adjusted in life than are people who have no close friends or social network to support them.

There are so many wonderful benefits to getting together as a group of Christians that it is easy to see why Christian gatherings and church meetings have been a vital part of Christian life since the time of Christ. Regularly getting together with other Christians is modeled and encouraged over and over again in the New Testament. At Spirit & Truth Fellowship, we encourage Christians to participate in regular gatherings, be they in homes, church buildings, offices and places of work, or wherever.

The cultural flow of the times we live in today is for people to do things alone. We listen to our iPods or MP3 players alone, walking along with little plugs in our ears. We bank at an ATM machine instead of interacting with a teller. We get gas at the pump without going in and paying someone at the sales counter and we can even check out our own groceries at the “self check out” lane. Sadly, many families have even given up dinner time together, often replacing it with “watch TV and eat” time. Over time, many have gotten used to doing things alone, resulting in people often being less socially skilled. Thus, starting and maintaining a conversation is becoming more difficult and conflicts more painful. Today, more than ever, is a time for Christians not to be conformed to the culture but to really work on connecting with one another and to develop social skills that support fulfilling interaction.

In spite of our encouragement to meet, however, we must make sure our meetings are beneficial and good. Paul had to write some very harsh reproof to the church at Corinth, and some of the harshest is in chapter 11.

1 Corinthians 11:17

In the following directives I have no praise for you, for your meetings do more harm than good.

Wow! After all the encouragement in the Bible about getting together, this verse is like a splash of cold water. When the Corinthians were meeting together, their meetings were actually doing more harm than good. God does not want, and has never wanted, people meeting together for meeting's sake, as if just going to the meeting won us favor with God. In the times of Isaiah people were gathering at the Temple to worship, but their hearts were not right before God. God rejected their gathering, accusing them of “trampling my courts.” In essence, God was saying, “Get off my grass!”

Isaiah 1:12

When you come to appear before me, who has asked this of you, this trampling of my courts?

God goes on to say that the “religious” things the people were doing were not helping them.

Isaiah 1:13-15

(13) Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations—I cannot bear your evil assemblies.

(14) Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them.

(15) When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers, I will not listen.

Thankfully, later in the chapter, God says that if the people change He will once again accept their worship and the people will prosper. Isaiah's words to the people of his time, as well as Paul's words to the church at Corinth, should startle us into the realization that not all meetings are good meetings, whether they were held in the Temple in Jerusalem or a house-church in Corinth. We need to understand what makes a meeting valuable or harmful, and work to be part of meetings that are a blessing to God and the people.

In Isaiah's day, one of the primary problems was that the people had blended the pure worship of God with pagan superstitions and idolatry. The people's lives were "full of superstitions," they "practice divination" (Isa. 2:6), and "their land is full of idols" (Isa. 2:8). Furthermore, people did not take care of each other, but oppressed the poor and weak (Isa. 1:17 and 23). During Paul's time, the meetings were exaggerating the social divisions that already existed in the Roman culture, and the richer and stronger Christians were not helping the poorer and weaker ones (1 Cor. 11:18-22).

Christians are to love and support each other, and according to Scripture, one of the reasons to get together is to "spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24). Thankfully, God has given us His Word to help us determine what constitutes a good meeting and who is a good leader to follow. Notice that in the Old Testament there is no "list" of character qualities a Levite or Priest should have before the people came to the Temple. That is because the Levites acquired their positions by birth, and people were supposed to worship at the Temple no matter who was priest. Things are different in the New Testament. God tells us specifically that a leader must have certain qualities, including being above reproach, the husband of but one wife, temperate, self-controlled, respectable, hospitable, able to teach, not given to drunkenness, not violent but gentle, not quarrelsome, not a lover of money, managing his own family well, not a recent convert, and he must also have a good reputation with outsiders (list taken from 1 Tim. 3:1-7).

Just as the leaders we follow should be knowledgeable people with godly character, the meetings we attend should help us to be holy and effective in our own ways of serving God. That means our meetings should cause us to be uplifted, live more dedicated and godly lives, challenge the sin in our lives, give us increased vision as to what we can accomplish as Christians, elevate the importance of family and friends, help us reach out to others with the good news, etc.

It is not likely that in any group of Christians everyone will believe exactly the same way, and God has certainly equipped us for different kinds of service. Thus, just because some differences exist inside any particular group, this does not mean that the meeting does more harm than good. However, equipped with Scripture, holy spirit, and wisdom, most Christians can sense when a meeting he or she is attending is doing more harm than good. Some people remain in those meetings anyway, generally because they have been convinced that it is wrong for them to leave. There is no need for Christians to stay in meetings that do more harm than good. Our lives are a great gift to us and to the world, and God created us in Christ to do good works. We need to be aggressive in searching out meetings where we can grow and thrive, and which will help us to fulfill our God-given services and callings. Thankfully, there are usually many opportunities for Christians to meet if we take the time to pray and look around at what is available. Let's meet together—for the good of God, His Son, ourselves, other Christians, and the world.

Notes:

1. Louw, J.P. and Nida, E.A., *Louw-Nida Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament Based on Semantic Domain* (United Bible Society, New York 1988), ekklesia.
2. Scripture quotations marked (NASB) are taken from the *New American Standard Bible*®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.
3. Scripture quotations marked (NLT) are taken from the *Holy Bible, New Life Translation*, copyright 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc. Wheaton, Illinois 60189. All rights reserved.

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TruthOrTradition.com/4good**

Be Together Forever

Most people are “people people.” When I say that I mean we all tend to enjoy being with friends and enjoy good company. While it is true that some people have been so mistreated in life that they do not like or trust others, that is not the natural state of mankind. God created us to be fulfilled when we are with others, sharing our lives with them and in return, them with us. How sad it is that death separates us from our families, friends, and God. That is why the Bible calls death an enemy (1 Cor. 15:26).

In His love and grace, God has offered us a way to be with our friends and loved ones forever. While the wages of sin is death (Rom. 6:23), the gift of God is everlasting life through Jesus Christ. He paid the price of death for every person, so that anyone who calls on his name can live forever, and forever be with God, Jesus and all the other wonderful people who have accepted Jesus as their Savior.

Getting saved is easy because Jesus has already paid the price of death for us. Romans 10:9 gives us clear instructions on how to be saved from everlasting death and have everlasting life:

“That if you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.”

Don’t let this life be the only time you enjoy your friends. Get saved and enjoy them forever!

**For further study please read our booklet,
Becoming a Christian: Why? What? How?
at TruthOrTradition.com/salvation**

Partner Profile

Luke & Natalie Plunkett

We are incredibly blessed to be partners with Spirit & Truth Fellowship. There are several things that we love about Spirit & Truth Fellowship, and these are the things that compelled us to enroll in the Partnership Plan when we got married in 2006.

One of the things we love is that they are so passionate about biblical research. They devote entire camps to teaching the principles of sound biblical research. We both learned how to use concordances, lexicons, and other Bible tools at the Teens & Twenties Camps. We love that they encourage people to search the Word of God for the truth rather than relying on the interpretations of men.

Spirit & Truth Fellowship also provides some awesome fellowship. These men and women aren't afraid to sing, dance, and have a great time praising the Lord. In addition to the uplifting praise and worship, the fellowship is guaranteed to have some powerful teachings and manifestations. Every member of the Body is encouraged to explore their gifts and grow stronger in the holy spirit. This isn't spectator Christianity, and we couldn't be happier!

We can't write about our partnership without mentioning the high-quality materials they produce: books, websites, teachings of the month, seminars, pamphlets, magnets, business cards, bumper stickers... these are the things that keep us going between the conferences and camps, the tools that enable us to spread the Word and build our own faith. We are especially excited that they are working on the *Revised English Version* of the Bible.¹ (It's looking great so far!)

The economy has been tough on many people these last few years, and we have felt that financial crunch as well. In September, we weren't sure we'd be able to attend the Twenties Conference, but thanks to some great believers at the Home Office, we were able to go. While we were there, we experienced a renewed sense of purpose. Anxious to build our own home fellowship and spread the Word, we stocked up on seminars, books, and other materials. We also decided to increase our monthly contribution. Normally, we cringe whenever we think about spending money, but not this time. We are glad to know that we can help people all over the world by giving a little bit from our paychecks. We take the words of 2 Corinthians 9:7 to heart:

2 Corinthians 9:7

Each man should give what he has decided in his heart to give, not reluctantly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.

There are many Christian organizations and ministries in the world, but we believe Spirit & Truth Fellowship is unique in its ability to reach people across the globe and to give them the tools they need to come to Christ and spread the truth of God's Word. We look forward to many more years of giving and growing.

Luke & Natalie Plunkett
Cincinnati, OH

Note:

1. John W. Schoenheit, *Revised English Version*® (REV®) and *The REV Commentary of the New Testament* (Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, Inc., Martinsville, IN, 2009). Available online for free at STFonline.org/rev

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Fuel for the Fire

Highlights from Live Out Loud

by Crystal Brim

12/30/09

Deep Breath. I inhale the crisp fresh air at Bradford Woods as I step onto a snowy path toward my cabin. With each breath, I let go of work and the world and draw in God—I feel Him in this beautiful nature. I breathe with anticipation that God is going to speak to me so clearly through the love of friends gathered here, through singing His praise, and searching His Word.

My Father God and my Lord Jesus Christ never disappoint—but I have been walking the deepest Valley of the Shadow of Death for many months; sometimes I can't hear through the pain and sometimes it's very hard to see God's goodness. So, I have nothing left but to cling desperately to the hope that He'll never forsake me. I'm here at Live Out Loud to see that—it's safe here and I know God has something big for me at this conference.

12/31/09

The people here are like my family—all my friends have come from the 4 corners of our country and it is a homecoming event for sure. In the past months I have sought God for healing and answers in my alone time with Him, but now with all God's kids together there is a spiritual force with me that I can feel. There are divine appointments with people set up every few hours and God is using them to speak to me in exciting ways: I'm starting to make headway toward healing that I simply could not have done outside the gathered Body of Christ. I see it, God! You are using your people to speak to me. Thank you for not remaining silent!

1/1/10

How good it is to bring in the New Year dancing and singing with pure joy. I threw off the heaviness of the past few months last night and joined all my friends at our dance party—full of silliness and just carefree fun. I'm so glad that we don't have to be religious at conferences; we can be in the world but not of it. We were just a bunch of God-lovin' kids who can dance up a storm and praise Him in our joy. I finally shed garments of sorrow last night for garments of praise! I love you Jesus and I love these people with whom you have blessed my life immeasurably!

Praise and Worship has been such a great way to connect. Something happens when we raise our voices together: something melts within us and melds our group as one Body. Lifting our voices and manifesting God's spirit in our prayers connects us to the Life Source. God, I can feel your power like a mighty wave when we sing and pray to you. God! I want to harness this power and walk in it every day. I know we can because we have your spirit in us; we have each other for encouragement and to help us stay strong. Let us not give up meeting together (thank goodness we are all on Face Book!).

Wow! These teachings are hot—I am scribbling away furiously in my journal. I have to get these words of life and truth down—I don't want to miss one scripture reference. The anecdotal wisdom people are sharing and each verse from the Bible are speaking to me so deeply. I am amazed at how God is using these teachings to answer my questions and dispel the darkness in which I've sat these past months.

Every word I write down brings healing to my soul. Whoa...tears are starting to slip down my face—God is showing up for me! He hasn't abandoned me—He isn't ignoring me. It really isn't His fault that people have hurt me so badly. I've known this in my head, but my soul is so wounded because I prayed earnestly and He didn't protect me from the evil intent of others. Listening now, each scripture contains answers—the Word written so long ago is actually answering the questions of my broken heart. I can't believe it. God is real and He

is working and His Word is life. These teachings are breathing life back into my soul. These words are breathing hope back into my heart.

1/2/10

When I get home, I am going to sit down with these notes from teachings and workshops. I am going to meditate upon them. This last teaching is about breathing; breathing in and out the Word, breathing in and out Christian fellowship. I realize that I have been holding my breath for the past 5 months and it feels like death—I just couldn't do anymore but be in those moments and try to survive. That was where I was before I came to Live Out Loud. But God has truly changed my life here—He has set me upon a new path with some answers, a new focus, and with renewed hope. God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ do not disappoint.

I am finished with well-intentioned promises of seeking the Lord after conferences. At this point in life there is no alternative; there is no other option but to breathe in His Word and the fellowship of his people. Jesus has brought me back from death and the grave in more ways than one—I will never hold my breath again.

And so, I close my cabin door behind me and see that snowy path leading toward work and the world—but I am not the same woman. I'm filled with new life and hope. My feet are grounded on the Rock of Christ. Confident in His strength, I take my first step down that path. I smile peacefully, and take a deep, deep breath.

**View all the Live Out Loud pictures at
STFonline.org/photos**

Figures of Speech

Euphemismos (Substitution)

by John W. Schoenheit

The ability to communicate with words is one thing that sets mankind apart from all other creatures. God is the Author of language, and no one has ever used language as precisely as God does in the Bible, including His use of figures of speech, of which there are more than 200 varieties in Scripture.¹

The figure of speech we are going to study in this issue of *The Sower* is *Euphemismos* (euvfhmismoj), from which we get our English word “euphemism.”² The root of the Greek word is *eu* meaning “good,” and *phemi*, meaning “speech.” The verb *euphemeō* and the noun *euphemismos* referred to “good speech,” and the range of meanings those words had in ancient Greece was very broad. Uses included using words that were good omens, shouts of triumph, speaking well of or praising someone, and prayer and praise offered to the gods. More along the lines of the English definition of euphemism, other ancient Greek meanings of the words were to abstain from inauspicious words, and to speak in a mild, soft manner.

The modern definition of euphemism is “the substitution of an agreeable or inoffensive expression for one that may offend or suggest something unpleasant.”³ Thus if we do not want to say someone “died,” we say he “passed,” or “passed away.” If we do not want to say two people engaged in sexual intercourse, we say they “slept together.” If we do not want to say a couple is committing adultery, we say they are “having an affair.”

The difference between a true euphemism and an idiom can be very subtle, and often the definitions overlap. An idiom is a figure of speech in which the use of a word or words is peculiar to itself in that it has a meaning that usually cannot be derived from the literal meaning of the word or words. Idioms have to be individually learned because the meaning of the words is not literal, but assigned by the culture. While most euphemisms are idioms, many idioms are not euphemisms. That is because many idioms are hard, harsh, cold-hearted, and cynical. In contrast, true euphemisms are an agreeable and inoffensive way to refer to something, or a way to refer to a subject by suggestion instead of by direct address.

For example, if we are speaking with someone whose loved one has died, we can say the loved one “passed away” to soften the reality of the situation, but we cannot use some of the common idioms such as “kicked the bucket,” “bought the farm,” “assumed room temperature,” or “cashed in their chips,” and get the same effect.

Because euphemisms by their very nature deal with difficult, delicate, or potentially embarrassing situations, it is natural that the preponderance of euphemisms has to do with death, sex and “going to the bathroom” (which is itself a euphemism for urinating or defecating). Writing about euphemisms is a delicate task, because the subjects need to be handled clearly but graciously.

Genesis 15:15

You, however, will go to your fathers in peace and be buried at a good old age.

God told Abraham he would go to his fathers, a clear euphemism for dying.

Leviticus 18:6 (KJV)

None of you shall approach to any that is near of kin to him, to uncover *their* nakedness: I *am* the LORD.

The euphemism “uncover their nakedness” is commonly used in the Old Testament instead of more graphically discussing sexual intercourse.

Judges 3:24 (KJV)

When he [Ehud] was gone out, his [the king’s] servants came; and when they saw that, behold, the doors of the parlour *were* locked, they said, Surely he covereth his feet in his summer chamber.

“Covers his feet” is a euphemism for defecating, because in squatting down the body and clothes covered the feet. Many translators feel that “covers his feet” is too unclear for the modern reader, so many modern versions read, “relieving himself,” which is an English euphemism for what the king was doing.

Ecclesiastes 12:5 (KJV)

Also *when* they shall be afraid of *that which is* high, and fears *shall be* in the way, and the almond tree shall flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail: because man goeth to his long home, and the mourners go about the streets:

This verse is about old age, and some of the less pleasant things that happen. Aged people are more typically afraid of falling, thus “afraid of *that which is* high.” The almond tree bloomed brilliant white, thus, the statement about the almond tree flourishing is a euphemism about the white hair that comes with old age. Also, the word “desire” in the phrase “desire shall fail” is a euphemism, but one that is more complex than it seems. The literal Hebrew is the “caper berry fails” (or “is broken”). Understanding the euphemism requires knowing that the caper berry was considered by the ancient Hebrews to be an aphrodisiac, increasing sexual desire. For the caper berry to fail meant that one’s sexual desire was gone and could not even be regained by stimulation.

Isaiah 7:20 (KJV)

In the same day shall the Lord shave with a razor that is hired, *namely*, by them beyond the river, by the king of Assyria, the head, and the hair of the feet: and it shall also consume the beard.

The “hair of the feet” is a euphemism for the pubic hair. Some modern translations wrongly have, “hair of the legs” instead of “hair of the feet,” and miss the euphemism. The Assyrians were among the most ruthless and cruel of the ancient warriors, and Israel had abandoned Yahweh’s protection, so Israel was subjected to the most horrific circumstances, including being shaved by their captors. Similar euphemisms regarding feet occur in 2 Kings 18:27 and Isaiah 36:12, where the Hebrew words, “water of the feet” mean urine. Also, Ezekiel 16:25 (Hebrew text) says that Jerusalem “spread wide her feet” to everyone who passed by, an idiom for having sexual intercourse with them, which itself was idiomatic for entering into covenants with the foreigners and foreign gods.

Ezekiel 16:7 (KJV)

I have caused thee to multiply as the bud of the field, and thou hast increased and waxen great, and thou art come to excellent ornaments: *thy* breasts are fashioned, and thine hair is grown, whereas thou *wast* naked and bare.

Sexual references are difficult to express delicately, and this verse is a great example. The Hebrew reads that the woman (Jerusalem) had come to the “ornament of ornaments” which the context reveals is her breasts. Interestingly, some versions shy away from the idea that the breast is an ornament, and translate the verse to say that the woman herself is the ornament. Thus, the *Holman Christian Standard Bible* says the woman “became very beautiful,” the NIV says she “became the most beautiful of jewels,” and the NRSV says she “arrived at full womanhood.” Other versions recognize that the subject of the sentence is not the woman herself but her “ornaments,” but avoid being too explicit. Thus, the ESV says the woman “arrived at full adornment,” while the NASB says she “reached the age for fine ornaments.”

John 11:11

After he had said this, he went on to tell them, ‘Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep; but I am going there to wake him up.’

The word “sleep” is a common biblical euphemism for death (Job 7:21; Ps. 13:3; 90:5; Dan. 12:2; John. 11:11; 1 Cor. 11:30; 15:51; 1 Thess. 4:14; 5:10).

Notes:

1. E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (Baker Book House, Grand Rapids, MI, reprinted 1968).
2. The spelling of the Greek word is different in Doric Greek from Koine Greek, so some lexicons may have different spellings.
3. *Miriam-Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary: Eleventh edition* (Marriam-Webster, Incorporated, Springfield, MA, 2004), “euphemism.”

**For many more figures of speech used in the Bible visit
TruthOrTradition.com/figures**

The Vine

“Going to Church”

Has it Gone Out of Fashion?

by Michael L. Patten

In the post-modern culture of the early twenty-first century, the question, “Has going to church gone out of fashion?” seems to be very relevant. It would seem that many of my generation as well as those of my children’s generation have voted “yes” with their feet.

The percentage of American adults who identify themselves as Christian dropped from 86% in 1990 to 77% in 2001, as reported at religioustolerance.org. This website also quoted the Barna Research group, “From 1992 to 2003, average attendance at a typical church service has dropped by 13% whereas the population of America has increased by 9%!”

The post-modern atmosphere of our culture today is in support of these trends. However, at Spirit & Truth Fellowship International we, along with other Christians, are committed to turning the tide of this trend. The opening paragraph of our Statement of Beliefs¹ is:

“We believe the Scriptures are God’s “heart” revealed to mankind. The reason God wants us to know the truth is so we can live it and share it with others. God wants us to be “imitators” of Him, and His chief characteristic is love. Truth without love is vanity; love without truth is sentimentality.”

This statement reflects the balance God desires for His children to have between doctrine (right believing), and practice (walking out our faith).

Ephesians 4:1 (REV)²

Therefore, I, the prisoner of the Lord, urge you to walk worthily of the calling with which you were called.

The word “worthily” in this verse corresponds with the Greek word, *axios*, of which Richard Lenski said, “Axios has the idea of equal weight. Conduct and calling are to balance in weight.”³ The first three chapters of Ephesians are devoted to doctrine, while here in this verse we have the transition to the next three chapters, which focus more on practice, and how we are to be in relationship with one another. God puts equal weight on doctrine and practice. We are called in one Body, so our conduct is to reflect that by meeting together as the Church.

A major underlying premise of the New Testament is that followers of Christ would be actively involved in a local church. This is not optional, but a matter of obedience. In the summation of the first section of the book of Acts, the pattern for the Church of Jesus Christ is set, which involves being together. Four times in seven verses (Acts 2:42-48) the point is made that believers met together. The notion that a follower of Christ can be faithfully carrying out his calling isolated from other saints is not supported by Scripture. In fact to not be in relationship with a local church is aberrant behavior for a Christian.

Hebrews 10:25

Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

This section of the book of Hebrews opens with a participial statement summarizing what has gone before in preceding chapters. It also shows us on what basis we should heed the exhortations that follow.

Hebrews 10:19-21

(19) Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus,
(20) by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body,
(21) and since we have a great priest over the house of God,

The conjunction “therefore,” in verse 19, not only transitions us into this new section but also points back to what has been handled so fully in the preceding chapters. These include the High Priesthood and sacrifice of Christ, as well as our assurance that the entry into the sanctuary of God has been secured.

What follows are three exhortative subjunctives. These verb forms require action based upon what has preceded. “Let us draw near; let us hold unswervingly; let us consider one another” are not optional, but commands. These three are put in the order of faith, hope, and love.

Hebrews 10:22

Let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water.

Regarding faith, our relationship with God is the focus. To draw near to the sanctuary requires **maintaining** the condition of one’s heart by cleansing the conscience. This is done by constantly applying the blood of the Lamb to our conscience as needed. At the new birth the **shed** blood of Jesus Christ, in addition to giving us a new nature, cleanses us of sins committed previously. Subsequent sins must be confessed, which **applies** his blood to our conscience.

1 John 1:9 (REV)

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to **cleanse** us from all unrighteousness.

The second of the three exhortative phrases encourages us to hold the hope unswervingly.

Hebrews 10:23

Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful.

Both the world which is lacking hope, as well as the Christian who is to proclaim our hope in Jesus Christ, are implied by the word **profess** in this verse.

1 Peter 3:15

But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,

The final “let us” has to do with conduct in relationship to the church.

Hebrews 10:24 and 25 (REV)

(24) And let us consider one another, to spur *one another* on to love and good works,
(25) not forsaking our own assembling together, as is the habit of some, but exhorting one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

At Spirit & Truth Fellowship we are invested in right doctrine, and at the same time we give equal weight to the need for individuals meeting together in local areas. We have established the Fellowship Network to help people connect with others, both in their local areas and with others on a national, or even an international level.

At STFonline.org/network you can find listings of local fellowships as well as resources to assist in forming a new fellowship. If you want assistance in finding or starting a fellowship in your area, please contact me at Mike@stfonline.org.

Notes:

1. To read our Statement of Beliefs visit STFonline.org/beliefs
2. John W. Schoenheit, *Revised English Version® (REV®) and The REV Commentary of the New Testament* (Spirit & Truth Fellowship International, Inc., Martinsville, IN, 2009). Available online for free at STFonline.org/rev
3. Richard Lensky, *Commentary on the New Testament* (Augsburg Publishing House 1937, Minneapolis, MN, Interpretation of Ephesians), p. 506.

STFonline.org/network

The ABC's of God

Dinner with Zacchaeus

by Cara Hanson

If you could have dinner with anyone from biblical times—besides Jesus—whom would you choose? I don't really care for seafood, so Peter, Andrew, and any other fishermen are out. A recent study of the record of Zacchaeus assured me that at the very least, his house would be clean.

Zacchaeus was a tax collector who was a rich man, but vertically challenged. When he wanted to see Jesus passing by, he had to climb a sycamore tree.

Luke 19:5

When Jesus reached the spot, he looked up and said to him, "Zacchaeus, come down immediately. I must stay at your house today."

As a mom of three little kids, this caught my attention. We don't have many material goods to make a mess in our house, but I rarely feel that my house would be ready for a visit from the Lord himself. For one thing, if you ever happened to get lost in our house, you could just follow the trail of discarded Cheerios that have fallen haphazardly from tiny hands. No matter how much I clean and vacuum, you would think there was some sort of Plague of Cheerios that makes them appear on every surface and in every crevice in the house.

Look at Zacchaeus's response to the Lord's request:

Luke 19:6

So he came down at once and welcomed him gladly.

If it were me, I would welcome him gladly, but then I would distract him while I raced ahead to my home to throw everything in trash bags and shove them under the bed, in closets, etc. Zacchaeus was ready immediately to receive Jesus at his home. He was joyful, so he couldn't have been too concerned about his house being in a state of disarray.

I shared this record with my children and asked them if they thought our house was ready for a visit from Jesus. They answered honestly and succinctly with, "No." This experience gave birth to our introduction of "Zacchaeus Chores" and the concept of working diligently out of love.

Our children were given a list of daily and weekly chores that they had to do with the mindset of the following verses:

Colossians 3:23 and 24

(23) Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,

(24) since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

Never before have I seen children working so hard, and having so much fun while doing it. They were much harder on themselves than I have ever been. Grace (5) finished cleaning the sink and then went back to do it over again because "it's not good enough for Jesus." When I told Luke (3) that he was done sweeping the floor, he actually started crying because he "wasn't done yet." I had asked them to wash the table, and not only did they do it, but they also started washing the walls, a chore that isn't even on the list!

I'm not telling this story so that you will think we have some group of "superkids," but so that I can relate the lesson that I learned from my own children. God loves a "cheerful giver," and that can apply to other areas of our lives besides money. If we do work "reluctantly or under compulsion," even the heathen can do the same. God wants us to abound in "every good work," which means that we need to get off the proverbial couch and actually do work. The key to our diligence will be our motivation. Everything we do should be energized by our love for our Lord whom we serve.

1 Corinthians 13:3

If I give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body to the flames, but have not love, I gain nothing.

I have spent a lot of time surrounded by people who just get by in life by doing the bare minimum. I was first made aware of this by a former boss who used to constantly grumble and complain that he never saw his staff "supererogate." Everyone just smacked their gum and went back to playing computer Solitaire, and I assumed they were not going to look that one up in the dictionary:

Su-per-er-o-gate (verb): To do more than is required, ordered, or expected.¹

As Christians, we should be raising the bar when it comes to diligence. We represent our Lord, and the rest of the world is forming their opinion of him based on our behavior. When we are at work and asked to do A, we should be doing A, B, and C. If we are getting our home ready for fellowship, we should be cheerfully serving the Lord in order to bless him and the saints we love. In our prayer life, time in the Word, and serving the saints, we should be going above and beyond expectations. As usual, Jesus is the ultimate example:

John 14:2 and 3

(2) In my Father's house are many rooms; if it were not so, I would have told you. I am going there to prepare a place for you.

(3) And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come back and take you to be with me that you also may be where I am.

Jesus says that there are many rooms, but he is not trying out all of the beds and hammocks; he is working! If Jesus is preparing a place for us, we can rest assured that he is doing more than just stocking the mini bar and leaving a mint on our pillow. We are talking about a man who never gave the bare minimum. He was asked by our heavenly Father to be obedient, and he "became obedient to death—even death on a cross!" (Phil. 2:8). What an amazing example for all of us!

When Jesus returns, I hope that he finds us working cheerfully and diligently for him. The next time around, he won't just be coming for supper or an overnight visit. In the meantime, we can strive to meet and exceed his expectations, looking forward to a warm welcome into his kingdom.

"Lord Jesus, you are welcome at my house today. I hope I have served you in every way. I'll give you my all in whatever I do. You died for me, Lord, and I'll live for you!"

- from our "Zacchaeus Chores" poem

Note:

1. American Heritage College Dictionary, 3rd Edition, Houghton Mifflin Company, Boston, MA, 1993.

Dear Sower

Revelation Seminar

We are doing this study right now (The Book of Revelation) and love it. The study truly makes me proud and thankful to be a child of God. My husband then made a “Rapture Box” to hang on our wall to start the communication with our unsaved friends.

Annie Petri
A Facebook Fan

Editor’s Note:

Visit TruthOrTradition.com/audio
to listen to our free online audio seminar on The Book of Revelation.

Free Seminars

Just wanted to say I find it absolutely AWESOME that we get to offer so many seminars and teachings for free online. You guys got it goin’ on! God is surely blessing us, isn’t He?!

Jack & Nina Mullen
Nashville, TN

Editor’s Note:

Thanks to the faithful support of our partners & contributors, we can make all our audio seminars available online for free at TruthOrTradition.com/audio

New Life in Christ

This free class (New Life in Christ: Foundations for Powerful Christian Living) is one of the best investments of your time that you’ll ever make. If you’re seeking truthful godly knowledge, these teachings are for you!

Gary W. Brewer
Belfair, WA

Editor’s Note:

Listen to New Life in Christ: Foundations for Powerful Christian Living for free at TruthOrTradition.com/audio

A Breath of Fresh Air

I appreciate your ministry of the Word of God - you are a breath of fresh air and a Great Blessing to the lives of many.

Blessings to you!
A YouTube Fan

Editor’s Note:

This feedback was left on our YouTube video channel at TruthOrTradition.com/youtube

Class Available Online

I’ll be starting my class this evening! Thanks again. I am looking forward to a great and blessed experience in this class.

Thank you guys for making this class available online and FREE! Thanks for the love and more power to all of you. God bless you!

Hananish Joy Odarve
Philippines

Editor's Note:

Listen to New Life in Christ: Foundations for Powerful Christian Living for free at TruthOrTradition.com/audio

Bible Manners & Customs

Watched the manners & customs videos. Brilliant. Love everything you do. God bless you all.

Shirley Whittaker
Raleigh, NC

Editor's Note:

To watch our free online video series on Bible Manners & Customs, visit TruthOrTradition.com/series2

YouTube Feedback

This truly touched my heart and humbled my stupidity! Thank you for adding change into my life and my heart. To become more and more full of adoration.

Bishop Jeremiah Norton
A YouTube Fan

Editor's Note:

This feedback was left on our YouTube video channel at TruthOrTradition.com/youtube

At the beginning of February, our YouTube videos officially reached 100,000 views! We are very excited about this and believe the next 100,000 will arrive much faster. We hope and pray that our videos have been a blessing to you!

Send us your Feedback

**Do you have questions about the Bible?
Comments about our articles, audio teachings & videos?**

**We would love to hear from you!
Email us at STF@STFonline.org**