

# Unity and Fellowship

**Laura and Eldon Pirness**

At our wedding sixteen years ago, we started a guest book. In preparing to write this article, we looked through it. Smiles came to our faces as we remembered the fellowship and visits we have had with so many loved ones and friends. As we read each entry, it was almost as if each person materialized around us making up a “cloud of witnesses.” We felt again that fellowship with all those who have visited us. What a gift and a treasure!

## **One in Fellowship and Christ**

What is fellowship? One dictionary definition says it is a group of people meeting to pursue a shared interest or aim, or a company of equals or friends.

And what does unity mean? Definitions say it is “the quality or state of not being multiple” and “continuity without deviation or change as in purpose or action.”

These definitions also apply to us, God’s children. Our shared activities support us in our journey toward our final goal of heaven. The teachings of God’s kingdom are based on “the old paths” (Jer. 6:16), on the unchanging truths and teachings of Jesus Christ.

We gather to listen to God’s Word to gain strength on our earthly journey. We meet to teach and to learn, to build and maintain our spaces for gathering and for worship, to care for one another. All of these activities bring us together in a physical sense. But in working, listening, singing, celebrating, grieving, visiting and worshiping, we get to know one another from the heart. God’s spirit in us answers one to another.

We are a level-headed flock where one is not above another, and we have fellowship with Jesus Christ. “And truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). How can we have this close fellowship with each other and even with Jesus Christ? How can we have unity?

## **Forgive One Another**

In the same chapter of 1 John, it says: “If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (verse 7). We need to put sin away with the gospel so that our burdens are lifted and our journey made lighter. Believing this saving gospel is the cement that holds us together.

Jesus gave an example of this forgiveness when He forgave the sinful woman in the house of the Pharisee (Luke 7:37–50). She was a great sinner in human eyes, but she loved much, having been forgiven much.

When we also forgive one another, we feel that same love. The bond between us strengthens and we feel united and as one in Christ.

### **God's Word Instructs**

Scripture includes warnings about the danger of fellowship between those who walk in the light and those in darkness. "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? And what communion hath light with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14).

A believer is not on the same path as one who does not own living faith. If we were to have regular fellowship or associate often with such a one, it could happen that their way of thinking might start to look logical or right. If we begin to see matters of salvation in the same way as they do, it should be a warning to us to seek out the fellowship of the believers before we become shipwrecked in our faith.

These days it is possible to look for and find information on any topic. How easy it could be to follow our own reasoning in matters relating to faith and salvation! We need the guidance of God's Word and the encouragement of our escorts in faith to help us stay on the narrow way.

In Ecclesiastes, it says, "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow: but woe to him that is alone when he falleth; for he hath not another to help him up" (4:9,10).

We cannot forgive our own sins. May we keep our consciences clean and our hearts humble, so we don't lose sight of the light coming from God's kingdom!

### **Escorts in Faith, a Treasure**

Through Christ's merit work we have the gift of the gospel, the healing power that can repair broken love and our own faults and sins. We need unity and we can enjoy unity and fellowship together as we journey and wait for the day when we can shed this mortal body and meet our loved ones and our Lord and Savior in heaven.

## **Small Gestures Mean a Lot**

### **Leah Roiko**

Can a single person who lives away from other believers also experience unity and fellowship with God's kingdom and other believers? What helps this person to feel the love and unity of God's children?

In considering these questions, I recalled a time when I was living and working away from a congregation of believers. It was almost time for the store to close when a believing mother with her children came in to buy groceries. I was working the evening shift, ready to go home after a busy day.

We happened to see each other and though we weren't previously acquainted, she took time to stop and visit with me. The mother said that she also knew how important visits from other believers were when she was living far away.

Our brief conversation reminded me of the love that believers have for each other. Even small gestures can mean a lot to a fellow traveler. It's good to encourage those that are making travels through remote areas to visit local believers as they are able.

"Be not forgetful to entertain strangers for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Heb. 13:2).

## Remembered in Prayer

### **Marijo Roiko**

A snowy weekend in Grand Forks, North Dakota is not an unusual event, though it can be disappointing when I had hoped to make the four-hour drive to visit family and friends in Minnesota and attend services. Instead, I'm at home in my apartment with a cup of coffee listening to services online, watching the wind blow snow in huge drifts across my patio, grateful I'm safe and warm.

The minister's voice speaks familiar words of prayer, adding, "We also remember those who cannot be with us this morning due to health concerns or their temporal calling."

I have also sat in church, hearing similar words of prayer and thought of my own friends and family members who were unable to make it to services. It feels good to be remembered.

Even though I live alone in a far-off place, I know I'm not forgotten. Brief visits with other believers passing through town and calls or text messages asking when I will be in Minnesota again remind me of the love that God's children have for each other.

*The moment of our parting brings sorrow to our hearts; to earthly duties calling each one of us departs. We cannot be together though we desire to be; beyond the grave, however, each other we will see (SHZ 215:1,3).*

## A Good Place to Be

### **Josh Fuller**

The beautiful part about God's kingdom for me is that here a sinful one can be cared for. I have been able to experience this over and over again. I fall and God cares for me through my escorts. Just think,

nowhere else in this world can this happen but here in the kingdom of God. We are so fortunate to have escorts in faith who can preach the forgiveness of sins to us. Through believing this gospel, we have peace with God and remain in the unity of the congregation.

It is my desire to stay in the center of the flock and go to where the believers gather. For many, attending services means that we have a desire to hear the Word of God. Some also go for the fellowship, or someone may even be searching for the kingdom of God.

### **Notice and Welcome Others**

At services or at congregational events, we may often see a new face, someone who might not be so familiar to us. Perhaps he or she is a believer from another congregation, or maybe one who is searching for God's kingdom. It could be one who has recently received the grace to have their sins forgiven.

In such times it can be easy for us to just go our own way, in our own routine that is comfortable to us. But could this cause us to miss an opportunity to welcome someone in what may be an uncomfortable place for them, or to help someone in a time of need?

Have you recently noticed or reached out to a visitor in your congregation? At these times you might notice: are they connecting with others or do they appear lost in the crowd of people and don't know where to turn? A simple welcome and greeting of God's Peace can instantly make another feel at home in a new place. Noticing and welcoming a lonely one can also help to draw him or her closer to the center of the flock.

There are times when I have felt lost and doubts have come. It's easy to wonder: am I still believing, do I belong here? I have felt comforted when others have reached out to me. God knows what each of us needs to continue on this narrow way. We are so fortunate to have escorts in faith who help us get to heaven.

### **Discussion Points**

1. How can helping someone in practical matters bring fellowship and lead to being an escort in faith?
2. Can gossip turn small matters into large matters and bring disunity among believing friends? How can this happen and how can we help remedy the situation?
3. Think about a particularly difficult time in your life, or of helping someone through one. Share how you experienced fellowship and unity during that time.
4. Share the joys of unity and fellowship you have experienced in God's kingdom.