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Fellowship on the Sabbath

One of the greatest blessings God has given mankind is His holy Sabbath day. Every seventh day has been set apart, sanctified and made Holy from creation (Genesis 2:2-3). This is a special time reserved each week by God for man's spiritual and physical welfare.

by Lawrence Gregory

Man is a unique social being needing the companionship of others as he goes through life. We are born and reared in a social environment - our lives intertwine with many others.

"For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself" (Romans 14:7).

God realized this when He created Adam, for He observed, "it is not good that the man should be alone" (Genesis 2:18). So He created woman, for the man's companionship, and sanctified the Sabbath as their day of rest (Mark 2:27).

Solomon understood this fact when he wrote, "*Two are better than one*; because they have a good reward for their labor. 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. Again, if two lie together, then they have heat; but how can one be warm alone? And if one prevail against him, two shall withstand him; and a *three-fold cord is not quickly broken*" (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12).

Our lives were intended to be a balance of give and take, mutual help, encouragement, strength and protection.

The opportunities to speak words of cheer (Malachi 3:16), to delight in going to church meeting (Psalm 122:1), praising God on His Sabbath together with family and friends (Colossians 3:16), are precious. The preaching service, prayer and Bible studies give us a spiritual uplift that cannot be obtained in any other type of meeting.

David, "a man after mine own heart" (Acts 3:22), eagerly looked forward to the times he could be with others before God in worship (Psalm 111:1; Psalm 122:1). Paul *as his manner was* (Acts 17:2; 6-13) *regularly* sought to be with others on the Sabbath.

Throughout the ages, *two signs* have been given to identify the true people of God; (1) the *Sabbath day* (Exodus 31:16,17) and (2) *love* (John 13:35).

We know love is keeping God's Commandments and "he that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk [live], even as he walked [lived]" (I John 2:6).

Christ kept God's Sabbath.

If we withdraw ourselves and become "closet" Christians, avoiding other believers, we lose great opportunities to express the love of God that dwells in us. In fact, it is risky to try to dwell alone without Christian fellowship. The sheep fold provides special protection for the flock from the wolves and elements of danger a lone sheep is exposed to.

Webster's Dictionary describes a sheep fold as: a pen or enclosure for sheep or similar animals; a flock of sheep; a church or its congregation; any group having common goals, values and beliefs.

The Shulamite maiden in the Song of Solomon, chapter 1:7, asks the shepherd whom she loves; "Where thou *feedest*, where thou makest thy flock to rest at noon day: for why should I be as one that *turns aside* by [departs from] the flocks of thy companions?"

We can ask the same questions of Christ, whom we love. Where will we find Him and those whom He has called and separated from the "heat" of the day? Where do they "*feed*" and "*rest*" together? Why should I be like others who depart from their fellowship?

The shepherd's (Christ's) answer in verse 8 is very interesting, informative and gently corrective; "if you know not - and we should know - O *you* fairest among women [individual], go thy way forth by the footsteps of the flock [church], and feed [give and serve] thy kids [children, family, friends] beside the shepherd's [minister's] tents [congregation]."

If we desire to fellowship with Christ more closely, we can do so by going where He is each Sabbath day - "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the

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midst of them” (Matthew 18:20).

This does not mean we cannot have fellowship alone, privately, with God, but that a special blessing of His divine presence is manifested in the Sabbath assembly.

Jesus left us an example of going to church services *regularly* (Luke 4:16) on the Sabbath day. He ate with (Luke 14:1), taught (Mark 6:2), healed (Luke 6:6-11), did good (Luke 6:9) for others on the Sabbath day. Certainly at times He was alone on the Sabbath, but his “*custom*” was to spend part of the day in a public church service.

His whole life was dedicated to doing as Caiaphas, the high priest, prophesied: “That also he *should gather together in one* the children of God that were *scattered* abroad” (John 11:52).

It has not been left up to us to rationalize about the Sabbath day. We have been given a specific command: “Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labor, and do all thy work: *But the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God*: in it thou shalt not do any work, thou, nor thy son, nor thy daughter, nor thy manservant, nor thy maidservant, nor thy cattle, nor thy stranger that is within thy gates: For in six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is, and rested the seventh day: wherefore the Lord blessed The Sabbath day, and hallowed it” (Exodus 20:8-11, Matthew 12:12).

It is (1) a holy commanded assembly (convocation) and (2) to be kept in our homes (dwellings) (Leviticus 23:3).

To do neither one when possible is breaking the Fourth Commandment, disobeying God and cheating ourselves.

“*Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good work: not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together* as the manner of some is, but *exhorting one another*; and so much the more as you see the day approaching” (Hebrews 10:24, 25).

And “Wherefore *comfort yourselves together*, and *edify one another*, even as also ye do” (I Thessalonians 5:11).

Isaiah said in chapter 58:13, 14: “If thou turn away thy foot from the sabbath, from doing thy pleasure on my holy day; and call the sabbath a delight, and holy of the Lord, honorable; and shalt honor him, not doing thine own ways, nor finding thine own pleasure, nor speaking thine own words: Then shalt thou delight thyself in the Lord; and I will cause thee to ride upon the high places of the earth, and

feed thee with the heritage of Jacob thy father: for the mouth of the Lord hath spoken it.”

Now let’s consider several reasons for our Sabbath fellowship: (1) *It encourages others* when they see they are not alone in this way. (2) We in turn are encouraged. (3) It is a *public witness* to our neighbors, friends and relatives each week that we are following Christ. (4) It enables the *social* and *spiritual* function of the local church group to *develop* and operate more effectively. (5) We are inspired, taught and corrected through public preaching and worship. (6) We rehearse each week the spiritual type of living together in harmony during the millennium.

Perhaps some will say, “I don’t need to attend church. I keep the Sabbath, I love the truth, I have His Spirit, I fellowship alone with Christ and the Father, or I listen to sermon tapes each week at home.”

Granted this may be true, but why not *share* this day *with others*? Why not “let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven”? (Matthew 5:16).

Are there any legitimate reasons for not regularly attending the Sabbath service?

Let’s consider a few: (1) illness, (2) distance (i.e., transportation costs, etc.), (3) occasional outings, family visits, out-of-town trips, etc., (4) an unexpected “ox in the ditch” situation, (5) special times of retreat for private devotional periods.

What other reasons can you think of?

What is the difference between a reason and an excuse? That which is allowed to repeatedly and voluntarily dominate and control our Sabbath time is an excuse - that is, when we habitually allow other things we could do on other days or on an occasional Sabbath to interfere with our regular attendance in the service. *Perhaps we have not considered Sabbath service attendance as being as important for ourselves and others as it is.*

If you would like to share in the Sabbath blessing of being with others “like-minded,” please write our Information Center in Tulsa, OK, for the address of the congregation nearest you. Why miss out on one of the greatest blessings God has provided for you? Fellowship on the Sabbath - this week!

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