

KOINONIA —

Why It Matters So Much

They devoted themselves to the koinonia.

Acts 2.42

Real Christian or a Knockoff?

In our study last week, we saw that koinonia is at the heart of our Christian identity. Authentic Christian identity is rooted in the nature of God and in the work of Christ, formed in us through the Holy Spirit. In other words, the evidence that we are truly Christians is that we look like him, live like him, and love like him.

True spiritual koinonia characterizes the Godhead; they exist together in infinite fellowship and absolute intimacy (see John 14.26, 16.15). We have been brought into the “participative sharing” of the death and life of Christ (see 1 Corinthians 1.9, 10.16), and when the Holy Spirit is truly influencing our lives, our relationships with other believers will reflect the relationship and fellowship that characterizes the Father, Son, and Spirit (see 1 John 1.1-3; Philippians 2.1-2). The way that we live in relationship with other believers indicates the level and influence of the Holy Spirit’s presence in our lives.

After this prayer, the meeting place shook, and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. Then they preached the word of God with boldness. All the believers were united in heart and mind. And they felt that what they owned was not their own, so they shared everything they had. (Acts 4.31-32)

Don’t be a DIY disaster!

Here is a warning label that we need to continuously remind ourselves to heed:

Beware of the insidious tendency to curate your own spiritual experience.

Because of our sinful, individualistic nature, every one of us is chronically inclined to shape his own spiritual identity and journey, to decide what, when and how is best for me. This is why Jesus said:

“If anyone comes to me and does not hate father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters—yes, even their own life—such a person cannot be my disciple. And whoever does not carry their cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” (Luke 14.26-27)

Following Christ is not a DIY project. It begins, Jesus said, with forsaking every other identity—culture, family, personal—for the singular identity of Christlikeness. The cross means death, specifically, the death of self; but that opens the way to a far more valuable and purposeful life: the Christ-life. Only when all else, including self and individual choice, is forsaken, are we free to follow Christ.

Different Kinds of Koinonia—

In reality, you are already engaged in various kinds of koinonia, some of which are a dominating part of your identity. The question is whether you are engaged in Biblical koinonia and whether it is truly your Christian identity or just a marginal part of who you are. You may be part of a gaming community, ethnic or cultural community, or some other like-minded identity that you actively and perhaps extensively share with others. But if Biblical koinonia is not what characterizes our identity and relationships, it begs the question of whether we are really “in” Christ.

Devoted to the Koinonia—

The work of the Holy Spirit is to reveal Christ and guide us into “Christ truthfulness” (John 15:26; 16:13). And the more that we become like Christ, the more that we will be drawn into deeper fellowship with one another (see Colossians 3:9-16). More of Christ always and automatically leads to more koinonia—

to intimate fellowship and relationship with one another, walking together spiritually, sharing the same spiritual commitment, living Christ together as a visible spiritual community.

The Bible teaches us that our koinonia is the reflection of the koinonia that exists between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. When the first believers were filled with the Holy Spirit, they were drawn to each other in Godhead-like koinonia.

They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe at the many wonders and signs performed by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:42-47)

“Devoted to” is not a mandated result or a “works” effort. Rather, it is natural overflow and outflow of being filled with the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit draws and attracts to Christ. In Christ, self is lost and love and koinonia takes center stage.

God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us. (Romans 5:5)

But the fruit of the Spirit is love . . . (Galatians 5:22)

Follow God's example, therefore, as dearly loved children and walk in the way of love, just as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us as a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God. (Ephesians 5:1-2)

When we are truly filled with the Holy Spirit, we are attracted beyond ourselves; we see this in Acts 2:

- They were attracted to the Word and devoted themselves to hearing and learning together.
- They were attracted to one another and devoted themselves to “the fellowship.”
- They were attracted to the needs of one another and devoted all they owned to meeting each other's needs. (Cost becomes irrelevant when we are filled with the Holy Spirit.)
- Their visible, everyday “togetherness” attracted others to their fellowship and, ultimately, to salvation.

This is exactly what Jesus prayed would happen among his followers:

I pray also for those who will believe in me through [the apostles'] message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. . . . that they may be one as we are one— I in them and you in me—so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me . . . (John 17:20-23)

To a group of people who held on to multiple identities and different kinds of koinonia, the Apostle Paul said, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ” (1 Corinthians 11:1). Paul could say this because he had “trashed” every other identity (Philippians 3:4-10). As a result of “Christ in him,” Paul had an intense longing for koinonia, other believers were the joy and worth of his life, and nothing less satanic opposition could keep him from being with other Christians (see 1 Thessalonians 2:17-20).

Why does koinonia matter so much? Koinonia reveals whether we are truly “in Christ” and filled with the Holy Spirit. It determines our identity as genuine Christ-followers; it is the measure of our worth and value to Christ. And when we surrender self to the “koinonia of the Holy Spirit” (2 Corinthians 13:14), something amazing happens: our devotedness to one another attracts the world to Jesus! May it be so.