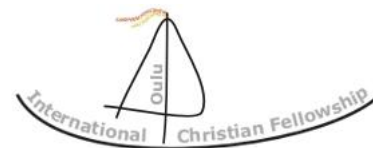


International Christian Fellowship of Oulu



Date & Time: Sunday, 18.10. and 25.10.2009 at 15.30

Place: Chapel of St. Luke

Topic: Christian Fellowship

Author: Bastian Fähnrich

Sources: Holy Bible, New International Version

"We belong together: The meaning of fellowship" by Bruce Milne, 1978

"Christian fellowship" by J. Hampton Keathley, 1997

"Membership" by C.S. Lewis, 1942

"The Purpose Driven Life" by Rick Warren, 2002

Welcome Words & Opening Prayer (Bastian)

Music & Songs

Two or three songs (Congregation's Choice)

[Hosanna](#)

Message

Dear sisters and brothers in Christ!

In this message I'd like to deal with the topic of "Christian fellowship". On the one hand, I will refer to it figuratively as a "church boat", that is as a body of believers. On the other hand, I will refer to it as "fellowshipping", that is as an activity of Christians in a congregation. It shall be especially important to make use of figurative everyday language as well as the Bible and its metaphoric expressions and stories in order to give a definition and to understand the meaning of Christian fellowship.

It is being said that through metaphors we gain understanding of the world around us and ourselves in it. Maybe some of us are familiar with George Lakoff's and Mark Johnson's book "Metaphors we Live By", which was published in 1980. In this book the authors state that metaphors are not just matters of language, but are used widely in reasoning and understanding. Here's an example: Sometimes you hear people say, when they reason that they are in the same kind of situation: "We're all in the same boat!" It is easy to see that by the help of this metaphor, "the same boat", they and we gain understanding of the condition described.

Now, to start dealing in more concrete terms with the topic of this message, I think that, figuratively speaking, the word "fellowship" itself can be seen as a metaphor. Let's use our imagination: Fellowship stands for or depicts a "ship", and "fellows" sailing on it. Regarding a "Christian fellowship", this could then mean Christian fellow believers sailing together on a ship.

Perhaps some of you have wondered about the logo of our congregation, the International Christian Fellowship of Oulu. Here it is, have a look at it. You will see that the logo is nothing more but the metaphor used in a visual or graphic way, according to what a logo is supposed to be, that is a sign representing a word, in this case "Christian fellowship":

Welcome Aboard!



Our lives are filled with metaphors. Even the very sentence I just stated is figurative: our lives are "filled" with... But let's get back to the topic of this message, Christian fellowship. When preparing this message, I thought to structure it in a reasonable manner and use metaphoric expressions. Thus I decided to elaborate everything that I have to say with metaphors relating to ships and seafaring. I believe that the Bible itself supports this approach, directly and indirectly, and I hope that you will understand the meaning of a Christian fellowship in the end of this message in a better way than before.

So, for the time being, just follow me in my thoughts and use your imagination to form your own ones according to what I'd like to say about Christian fellowship. However, feel free to interrupt me, if you have questions or comments or in case you become convinced that my reasoning is too speculative, abstract or may even lead away from Scriptural truth. We need to always test the spirits ([1 John 4:1](#)), and the Bible must be the standard for all teaching in a congregation ([2 Timothy 3:16-17](#)).

Well, here's the structure, bearing in mind the approach of using metaphors related to ships and seafaring:

1. The Sea of Life and Fellowships
2. The Origin and Basis of a Christian Fellowship
3. Aims and Purposes of a Christian Fellowship
4. Means and Instruments of a Christian Fellowship
5. Examples of a Christian Fellowship

1. The Sea of Life and Fellowships

Do you remember the metaphor I used a few minutes ago to give an illustration of people finding themselves in the same situation? Yes, the figurative statement was: "We are all in the same boat". Now, for Christians in a congregation this may be the case, insofar as they participate or share in the congregational life, but not for people who haven't joined other believers in a church community or "fellowship" and, equally important, who haven't personally come to Jesus Christ and accepted him as Saviour.

In more general terms we may say, figuratively speaking, that we as humans – believers and non-believers alike – are cast out on the "sea of life". That is, life can be looked upon as a sea, an ocean, with shallow and deep waters, storms, calms, islands, continents and harbours etc. It may appear to us that we're on our own out there, but in some way or the other we're all travelling, or sailing through the "sea of life" on some kind of a "fellowship". We're on a boat that keeps us above water and brings us across, to a harbour or some other place. We are steering the "fellowship" to a particular destination, figuring out where we're supposed to head to, how to sail, which route to follow, or to discover new passages through the "sea of life".

Let's point out that the figurative expression "sea of life" is not particular Christian, but in the Bible, both in the Old and New Testament, texts and stories can be found that support this view, using a bit of interpretative freedom, however. For instance, in the Psalms ([Psalm 107:23-31](#)) we find a narrative describing men travelling the sea on a merchant ship, and thereby getting into a heavy storm. After they have tried everything in their own power to stay afloat and are about to give up and drown, they cry out to God, who calms the waters and, last but not least, guides them to a safe haven. As a result of their rescue, they give thanks to God.

Let me use this example as an allegory or metaphoric story and state that on the "sea of life" many people are facing this kind of perilous situation: They are lost on the great ocean, tossed around by the winds and waves, engaged in their particular "fellowship", without orientation and a sense of direction. Moreover, we may add here that, as a matter of fact, all "sailors" or literally we as human beings have gone astray due to sinfulness and wickedness ([Isaiah 57:20](#)). We cannot save ourselves by our own strength and might but need the help of the Lord. Indeed, dear brothers and sisters in Christ, the only hope and rescue is God. And God helps, He answers the SOS (Save Our Souls) call thanks to His abundant love and mercy.

In the gospels ([Matthew 8:23-27](#), [Mark 4:35-41](#), [Luke 8:22-25](#)) we are told about a similar occasion, when the disciples are crossing a lake on a boat together with their Redeemer, Jesus

Christ, who is fast asleep, perhaps taking shelter in a cabin on deck or the cargo hold. Suddenly a strong wind arises and stirs up the waters and threatens the boat as well as the lives of its passengers. Even though the people on board are believers, Jesus' disciples, fear and doubt creeps in their minds and hearts. The situation gets worse, and eventually the disciples wake up Christ, desperate and revealing how little faith they have. But Jesus shows compassion towards them; He saves His disciples from the dangerous situation and gives them relief. We may ponder on this occasion also on an allegoric or metaphoric level and ask ourselves as believers: Do we have faith in Christ? How much faith do we put in Jesus? Do we expose enough confidence and trust, at least have a "little faith", that He will keep us safe on the "sea of life" and surely bring us across ([2 Corinthians 13:5](#))?

Well, these examples are probably a bit far-fetched. At this stage I merely want to point out that we as human beings find ourselves on the "sea of life", and that there are many kinds of "fellowships". In addition to different "fellowships", there are also various ways to travel, harbours to steer to etc. However, all "fellowships" are defined by the fact that the crew and passengers take part in a voyage on the "sea of life". Moreover, the crew and passengers make up a "body" of fellows, and share mutual experiences, activities, interests, aims and purposes on their journey through the "sea of life". And now I'd like to pose a crucial question to ourselves: On which boat are we travelling? Which "fellowship" do we join or have we signed on? What is a Christian fellowship?

2. The Origin and Basis of a Christian Fellowship

Fellowship is an important topic both in the Old and New Testament. Think about the creation of man respectively Adam and Eve, and their fellowship as husband and wife, being mutual helpers, keeping each other company, and God's fellowship with them before the fall ([Genesis 2](#)). Please note that man was not created to be alone among his own kind ([Genesis 2:18](#)), and God didn't intend man to fall away from Him through sin but to live eternally in peace and communion with Him and each other ([Genesis 2:16-17](#)).

Also, bear in mind Noah and the rescue of his "family" on the ark ([Genesis 9:1-17](#)), and God's calling of Abraham and the promise that he shall be the "father of many nations" ([Genesis 17:5](#), [Romans 4:18](#), [Isaiah 2:2-3](#)). There are many other occasions in the Old Testament revealing to us God's plan and history with His "people" ([Ezekiel 18:1-32](#), [Psalm 28:9](#)).

Or consider Jesus, first of all the Old Testament's Messianic hope given to all the "nations" ([Isaiah 42:1](#), [Psalm 67:2](#)). Furthermore, in the New Testament it becomes obvious that Christ is the Messiah when He gathers the disciples ([Matthew 4:18-22](#), [Mark 3:13-19](#)) and starts his ministry, calling all kinds of men and women to follow him ([Mark 2:13-17](#); [Luke 7:1-10](#), [8:40-56](#); [John 4:1-26](#)), tying them together into one body of fellow and mutually dependent Christian believers ([Matthew 16:18](#), [21](#); [Luke 1:68](#); [1 Corinthians 12:12-31](#); [John 17:20-26](#), [Romans 12:4-5](#)).

It is written in the Bible that Christ "takes a people for himself" from both the Gentiles *and* Jews ([Acts 15:14](#), [Amos 9:11-12](#), [Titus 2:14](#)). Jesus, in His Great Commission, sends out His followers to "make disciples of all nations" ([Matthew 28:16-20](#)): "Through the gospel the Gentiles are heirs together with Israel, members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus ([Ephesians 3:6](#)).

As a result of Christ's Great Commission and his disciples' obedience, everywhere in the world Christian "fellowships" are being built, and we know and may learn about and from these since the event of Pentecost, the bestowing of the Holy Spirit ([Acts 2](#)) and the rise of the early Church ([Acts 11:26](#)).

Last but not least, think about the letters of Jesus to Christian churches or "fellowships" in Revelation, when, before the second coming of Jesus Christ churches and individuals will have to stand or fail the tests of the end times ([Revelation 2;3](#)).

Referring to Scripture, we can claim that God alone respectively Jesus is the origin and basis of "Christian fellowship", and everyone who comes to faith in Christ is "welcomed aboard", invited (not hired but purchased! [Mark 10:45](#), [1 Peter 1:18-19](#)) to partake in the body of Jesus. We read in the Bible: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are

all one in Christ Jesus" ([Galatians 3:28](#)). Moreover, we are called into fellowship with a triune God: Jesus Christ, the Holy Spirit and God the Father ([1 Corinthians 1:9](#); [10:16](#); [2 Corinthians 13:14](#); [Philippians 2:1](#); [1 John 1:3-7](#)).

Of course, these considerations are all based on Jesus' calling of individual people through personal faith in Him but, as we can see too, it is essentially related to church community or congregational life and fellowship. I'd like to recall here that we as believers are meant to be "members together of one body, and sharers together in the promise in Christ Jesus" ([Ephesians 3:6](#)). C.S. Lewis once stated, pointing to Paul's letters to ancient churches, that "the very word membership is of Christian origin" (see [Romans 12:5](#), [1 Corinthians 6:15](#), [Colossians 3:15](#)).

This way of understanding a Christian as an essentially "fellowshipping" creature (with God and fellow believers, not with the world), is evident also in the Great Commandment. The Great Commandment states that we as humans and believers ought to love God with all our being *and* love our neighbours as ourselves ([Deuteronomy 6:5](#), [Leviticus 19:18](#), [Mark 12:28-34](#)). Jesus sums it up in His own words, giving special emphasis to love, one of the most distinct features of a Christian fellowship: "A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" ([John 13:34-35](#)).

Let's conclude this part of the message by stating that a Christian fellowship must be referred to as the body of Jesus ([Colossians 1:18,24](#), [Ephesians 2:19-23](#)), and thus it consists of people who have come to faith in Christ. Christian fellowship has its origins and basis in the triune God, who is revealed to all the people of this earth in Scripture.

To take up more figurative language, we may say that a Christian fellowship is a "rescue boat", and Jesus Christ Himself saves us from the perils and sins of the "sea of life". He is the One who welcomes us on board by His grace and our faith alone! It is a "fellowship" carved out of the wooden Cross of Calvary, and its lead sail is, figuratively speaking, made out of the linen or canvas that once covered the body of Christ, giving proof of Jesus' resurrection and our redemption.

In the next part of this message we'll be looking into where a Christian fellowship, here a single ship along with the entire Church (which may be perceived as a fleet of "fellowships" or "church boats", see [1 Corinthians 1:2](#), [Acts 15:41](#)), is supposed to head to and what are its aims and purposes, involving the crew and its passengers, and other fellowships or people sailing on them through the "sea of life".

3. Aims and Purposes of a Christian Fellowship

There are basically two aims and purposes of a Christian fellowship, and both are equally important.

The first purpose of a fellowship as the body of Christ or a "church boat" is to be a "vessel" for believers, which is intended to reach the haven of Heaven. It is crucial to note that a Christian fellowship should never aim to dwell in harbours that are corrupted in a worldly way; it may steer to them for the purpose of evangelisation, but it is not meant to stay there ([2 Corinthians 6:14-18](#)). Hence a "church boat" is meant to pursue courses or routes that are of godly purposes, and first of all its aim is to "sail" and make it safely through the "sea of life" both individually and as a community of people, who belong to each other as partakers in Jesus Christ ([Ephesians 2:19-23](#), [1 Corinthians 12:12](#)).

Of course, salvation is originally and ultimately personal and received by faith and grace alone ([Ephesians 2:8-9](#)), but the "Christian life at sea" also has an intrinsic collective and "laborious" dimension, insofar as individual believers are called to join and actively participate in a congregation and maintain and even build up their fellowship by various means and instruments ([Acts 2:42](#), [Hebrews 10:25](#), [Romans 12:5](#), [1 Corinthians 10:31](#), [Philippians 2:12-18](#)). We will be looking into these means and instruments in a little while (see below).

The second purpose is related to the fact that a Christian fellowship is distinct from other "fellowships" that are sailing on the "sea of life". A Christian fellowship or its members have a

special mission to accomplish, based on Jesus' Great Commission ([Matthew 28:18-20](#), [Mark 16:15](#)). Christian believers, sailing on a "church boat" seek to present the Gospel and, figuratively speaking, throw the "lifeline" to people on other "fellowships" who are on their way to Hell, or literally to the "lake of fire" ([Revelation 20:15](#), see also that "only the Lord's purposes prevail and last forever" in [Proverbs 19:21](#) and [Psalm 33:11](#)).

We may also say, again figuratively speaking, that a Christian fellowship is a "fishing boat" ([Luke 5:1-11](#)), and the crew's and passengers' aim is to get more people "on board" and into the saving presence of the Lord. God doesn't want anyone to be lost and drown in the "sea of life" but to be saved for eternity (see "For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life", [John 3:16](#); [Revelation 22:17](#))! I'd like to also emphasise here that the Great Commission is a "calling" to believers ([Hebrews 3:1,14](#)), individually and collectively. Moreover, it's a partnership with Jesus: in the Bible Christians are termed God's "fellow workers" ([1 Corinthians 3:9](#), [1 Thessalonians 3:2](#)), bringing and sharing the Gospel "on behalf of Christ" ([2 Corinthians 5:14-21](#)). Jesus says: "Peace be with you! As the Father has sent me, I am sending you" ([John 20:21](#)).

The mission of a Christian fellowship and its members, that is bringing the Good News to all nations ([Matthew 24:14](#)), along with the maintenance and building up of a "church boat", can be accomplished only with the help of God. The Lord provides different means and instruments to reach these two aims and purposes. In the next part of this message I'd like to explore these in detail, being convinced that Christian "fellowshipping" is a great and rewarding enterprise in the long run ([1 Peter 1:4](#), [Colossians 3:23-24](#), [Hebrews 10:32-39](#)), and that God takes care of us as believers at every stage of our journey through the "sea of life". The Bible says: "We are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved" ([Hebrews 10:39](#)) and "The Lord declares: Do not be afraid (...), for I am with you and will rescue you" ([Jeremiah 1:7-8](#)) or "Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified (...), for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you" ([Deuteronomy 31:6](#) and [Hebrews 13:5](#)).

Indeed, we as Christians are enabled to face all the heavy winds and deadly calms out there on the "sea of life", if we remain in Jesus, and hence stay together, complementing and edifying each other ([Romans 12:4-5](#), [1 Corinthians 12:27](#), [Ephesians 2:19-23](#), [Ephesians 4:11-16](#)). Perhaps a Christian fellowship could thus be christened by the name 'Immanuel', which means 'God is with us' ([Matthew 1:23](#); [Isaiah 7:14](#)). Remember Jesus' saying that "where two or three come together in my name, there am I with them" ([Matthew 18:20](#)). God is surely with us, and he meets all our needs ([Philippians 4:19](#)) through all times, until "the very end of the age" ([Matthew 28:20](#)). Let's keep in mind that even Satan or Hell cannot sink a true "fellowship" of Christian believers; Jesus promised: "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" ([Matthew 16:18](#)).

4. Means and Instruments of a Christian Fellowship

It almost goes without saying but I want to mention it nevertheless: The greatest means and instrument of a Christian fellowship is God or Jesus Christ Himself; the Bible says: "In Him we live and move and have our being" ([Acts 17:28](#)). And He, Jesus Christ the Son of Man and Mediator to God the Father is the One who passes on to us believers the mission of sharing the Gospel, and He commands us to reach out to unbelievers on the "sea of life" as well as to maintain and build up our "fellowship".

We thus need to stay connected with Him; we should never drift away ([Hebrews 2:1](#)) from Him, for "apart from Jesus we can do nothing" ([John 15:5](#)). Let me further illustrate the need of staying connected with Christ by taking up a Biblical metaphor of Jesus and relate it to seafaring: The Word of God refers to Christ as the "bright Morning star" ([Revelation 22:16](#)), by which, figuratively speaking, navigation is made possible. We are even instructed in Scripture to "keep our eyes and thoughts fixed upon Jesus" ([Hebrews 3:1](#), [Hebrews 12:2](#)).

Let's remind ourselves here also that about the time when Jesus Christ left this world and ascended to Heaven ([Mark 16:19-20](#), [Luke 24:50-53](#), [Acts 1:9-12](#)), God gave the Holy Spirit as a means and instrument for us to remain in Him and His truth; moreover, the Holy Spirit is given to us a counselor and guide. Let's refer to Jesus' own words in Scripture: "I [Jesus] will

ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor to be with you forever (...) The Counselor, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" ([John 14:16,26](#)) and "When he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth" ([John 16:13](#), [John 16:5-15](#)). Thus by partaking in Christ and with the help of the indwelling Spirit we are able to navigate safely through the "sea of life", and sail faithfully and obediently on the "ocean of possibilities".

The Word of God is yet another means and instrument, and we are told that it "equips us thoroughly" ([2 Timothy 3:14-17](#)). Scripture is a reliable and trustworthy "compass", "map" and "logbook" ([Psalm 19:7](#), [Psalm 43:3](#), [Numbers 33:2](#), [Psalm 102:18](#), [Matthew 5:18](#), [John 17:17](#)). It helps us to gain orientation and direction for our individual and collective lives by studying and applying it according to God's will. Furthermore, the Bible reveals to us the history, presence and future of His people, of the Church and its congregations. Scripture instructs us – through good and bad examples of other "fellowships" and "fellowshippers" – which course and route to take ([Psalm 119: 105,160](#)). Let's remember what the Bible itself mentions: "God's way is perfect, and His Word is flawless" ([2 Samuel 22:31](#)).

By means of examples the Bible tells us also how to overcome "deep and shallow waters" as well as storms. It shows us when, where, how and why to steer around "reefs", "icebergs" and "sandbanks". The Word of God makes us understand that in case we do not obey and watch out, we will be left "shipwrecked" ([1 Timothy 1:19](#)). Scripture warns us by means of commandments not to steer to or drop anchor in certain harbours, and it encourages us not to put our hope into earthly matters, or search for the "New World" as a paradise here on earth. Remember Jesus' saying: "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will never pass away" ([Mark 13:31](#)).

The Word of God and Holy Spirit also equips us to withstand hostile and evil influences from unbelievers, and counteract Satan's battleships that are out there on the "sea of life" to attack us and our "fellowships" (see the Armour of God: [Ephesians 6:10-19](#)). But, equally important, the Word of God and the Holy Spirit are the means and instruments that bring people into the saving presence of Jesus Christ. The Word of God both convicts us of sin and calls for repentance, and it reveals the possibility of joining Christ in forgiveness and truth; likewise the Holy Spirit both accuses people and draws them and us to God, and, being born again and baptized into Jesus, henceforth dwells within Christian believers ([Ephesians 1:13-14](#), [Titus 3:4-7](#)).

Last but not least, let's do not forget that the body of Christ itself, or we as believers and individual members in Jesus, are a means and instruments as well, individually and collectively. As we, you and me, make up a Christian fellowship or "church boat", we all have an important task in accomplishing the propagation of the Gospel in the whole world and the maintenance and building up of our "fellowship" along with the entire Church. The way(s) we contribute to a Christian fellowship and how we keep the "church boat" and ourselves in shape and "oceangoing" are crucial considering the God-given mission ([John 17:20-26](#)).

I'd like to invite you to again use your imagination and think metaphorically: We are, figuratively speaking, the "crew and passengers" of a Christian fellowship. Please note that there are many kinds of people "on board", and each and every fellow believer is needed on such a "church boat" in order to convince unbelievers in the "sea of life" about the Good News and to maintain and build up a Christian "fellowship" in Lord-willing ways.

The Bible says: "Just as each of us has one body with many members, and these members do not all have the same function, so in Christ we who are many form one body, and each member belongs to all the others" ([Romans 12:4-5](#), see other Scripture references above).

It's thus certainly not sufficient that only one person "casts out the nets" as a "fisher of men" ([Matthew 4:19](#); [Mark 1:17](#); [Luke 5:1-11](#)), for it yields much better results to do so and catch people for Christ in a joint effort and by various means ([Ecclesiastes 4:9-10](#), see for methods <http://www.yksitotuus.fi/english> and <http://www.yksitotuus.fi/rekry/english>). In fact, the profession of "fishers of men" applies to every "sailor", based on Christ's Great Commission, but some of us may be especially skillful in evangelisation. Of course, in addition to "fishers of men" there may be only one "captain" or a few "elders" and "leaders" or experienced "seamen" on a "fellowship". Likewise, there may be only a few people such as "cartographers", who have studied the Bible respectively the "map" and "logbook" or know how to use the "compass", and

are thus able to steer the "fellowship" and instruct others in the art and craftsmanship of Biblical navigation.

Some people could serve best at being in the "lookout" of a "church boat", making sure that dangerous areas in the "sea of life" are spotted on time. Others may have the function of a "ship's doctor" who detects and heals diseases and all kinds of evils on board with the power of the Lord. Others, again, may contribute to the wellbeing of the "fellowship" by working in the "galley" or "cabins", providing food, drink and shelter; yet others could be excellent at repairing things such as the "rigging" and "sails" or helping out with other tasks like cleaning the "deck" etc. However, even the ones that are "poor in spirit" and of "little faith" are important for a Christian fellowship – they may be only "passengers" for the time being, but in due time they should be restored and mature in Jesus, through the help of God and care of fellow Christian brothers and sisters. Let's also remember that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" ([1 Timothy 1:15](#)) and that "he who is least among us all—he is the greatest" ([Luke 9:46-50](#), see also [Matthew 25:31-46](#)).

The point I'd like to make here is that literally everyone "on board" is required to keep the Christian fellowship "afloat" and "on course" or "en route", true and in line to its mission given by God. Each and everyone should take part in the tasks and make available his or her natural and spiritual gifts for the common good and joint service to fellow believers *and* unbelievers. The Bible tells: "Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (...) If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." ([1 Peter 4:10-11](#), see also [Matthew 20:28](#) and [Ephesians 4:11-16](#))

In my understanding, the effectiveness of a Christian fellowship and each individual "crew member" or "passenger" depends on the kind of serving together. More precisely, it depends on us doing our very best to accomplish the God-given mission in a common effort, originating and being based in Christ and endowed with the Word of God and the Holy Spirit. The Bible even shows that we, as a body of believers, ought to live out our Christian faith in exemplary ways, that is in such ways that have an "enlightening" effect on others. We read in the Bible: "Live such good lives among the pagans that (...) they may see your good deeds and glorify God" ([1 Peter 2:12](#)). Scripture also mentions that "we are the light of the world", following "Christ the Light", and that we should "let our light shine before men, that they may see our good deeds and praise our Father in Heaven" ([Matthew 5:13-16](#), [John 8:12](#), see also [Philippians 2:12-18](#)). I'd like to note here that by our individual and collective lives we are meant to reflect God's glory bring glory to God ([1 Corinthians 10:31](#), [2 Corinthians 3:18](#)).

Living such good and glorious lives and being the light of the world is not easy, of course, but this is exactly what is required from us, if we claim to have faith in Jesus Christ. Please remember also that "faith, if it is not accompanied by action, is dead" ([James 2:17](#)). Hence I believe that along with reaching out with the "fellowship" on the "sea of life" and winning souls for Christ, we as fellow believers should especially put our efforts in maintaining and building up the "church boat" itself, for this will certainly have an effect on unbelievers, as we just saw by looking into Scripture. Besides the good effect on others, we may benefit ourselves from taking care of our Christian fellowship and all its "fellowshippers". For the remaining paragraphs of this part of the message, I'd thus like to look into ways of maintaining and building up a Christian fellowship. Let's do this by reviewing and focusing on Bible verses that emphasise the mutuality and reciprocity of Christian believers in working together for the same aims and purposes. I've grouped the verses according to activities, and they contain usually words such as "together", "one another" or "each other":

Meet with one another

"They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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](#))

"Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing." ([Hebrews 10:25](#))

Break the bread with one another

"They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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](#))

"Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ?" ([1 Corinthians 10:16](#))

Love one another

"A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another." ([John 13:34](#), see also [Romans 13:8-10](#))

"Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love." ([Ephesians 4:2](#))

"Be devoted to one another in brotherly love. Honor one another above yourselves." ([Romans 12:10](#))

"Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited." ([Romans 12:16](#))

Spur one another to good deeds

"And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds." ([Hebrews 10:24](#))

Encourage and build up each other in faith

"Encourage one another and build each other up." ([1 Thessalonians 5:11](#), see also [1 Thessalonians 4:18](#))

"Encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness." ([Hebrews 3:13](#), see also [10:22-25](#))

"I [Paul] long to see you so that I may impart to you some spiritual gift to make you strong—that is, that you and I may be mutually encouraged by each other's faith." ([Romans 1:11-12](#))

Share with one another

"They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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](#))

"Share with God's people who are in need." ([Romans 12:13](#))

"Moreover, as you Philippians know, in the early days of your acquaintance with the gospel, when I [Paul] set out from Macedonia, not one church shared with me in the matter of giving and receiving, except you only." ([Philippians 4:15](#))

Show hospitality to one another

"Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling." ([1 Peter 4:9](#))

Study the Bible, teach, instruct, admonish one another

"Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom." ([Colossians 3:16](#))

"I [Paul] myself am convinced, my brothers, that you yourselves are full of goodness, complete in knowledge and competent to instruct one another." ([Romans 15:14](#), see also [Proverbs 27:17](#), [1 Thessalonians 5:12](#))

Confess your sins to one another

"Confess your sins to each other." ([James 5:16](#))

Forgive one another and reconcile with each other

"Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you." ([Colossians 3:13](#))

"Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." ([Ephesians 4:32](#), see also [Matthew 5:9](#))

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong." ([1 Thessalonians 5:15](#))

"Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other." ([Galatians 5:26](#))

"Don't grumble against each other, brothers, or you will be judged. The Judge is standing at the door!" ([James 5:9](#), see also [Ephesians 4:26](#))

"Let us stop passing judgment on one another. Instead, make up your mind not to put any stumbling block or obstacle in your brother's way." ([Romans 14:13](#))

"God reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation." ([2 Corinthians 5:18](#))

"I [Paul] appeal to you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree with one another so that there may be no divisions among you and that you may be perfectly united in mind and thought." ([1 Corinthians 1:10](#))

"There should be no division in the body, but that its parts should have equal concern for each other." ([1 Corinthians 12:25](#))

However:

"Have nothing to do with the fruitless deeds of darkness, but rather expose them." ([Ephesians 5:11](#))

"Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?" ([2 Corinthians 6:14](#))

"Preach the Word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction." ([2 Timothy 4:2](#), see also [Titus 1:5-16](#))

Be at peace with one another

"Be at peace with each other." ([Mark 9:50](#))

"Live in peace with each other." ([1 Thessalonians 5:13](#))

Be honest to one another

"Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices." ([Colossians 3:9](#))

Carry each other's burdens, help and serve one another

"Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ." ([Galatians 6:2](#))

"You, my brothers, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the sinful nature; rather, serve one another in love." ([Galatians 5:13](#))

"Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms (...) If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God

provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ." ([1 Peter 4:10-11](#), see also [Matthew 20:28](#) and [Ephesians 4:11-16](#))

Please note that we as believers partake also in the suffering of Christ, individually and collectively: "I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death." ([Philippians 3:10](#))

Paul writes in Hebrews: "Remember those earlier days after you had received the light, when you stood your ground in a great contest in the face of suffering. 33 Sometimes you were publicly exposed to insult and persecution; at other times you stood side by side with those who were so treated. 34 You sympathized with those in prison and joyfully accepted the confiscation of your property, because you knew that you yourselves had better and lasting possessions. 35 So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. 36 You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. 37 For in just a very little while, "He who is coming will come and will not delay. 38 But my righteous one will live by faith. And if he shrinks back, I will not be pleased with him." 39 But we are not of those who shrink back and are destroyed, but of those who believe and are saved." ([Hebrews 10:32-39](#))

And in 2 Corinthians: "3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, 4 who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God. 5 For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows. 6 If we are distressed, it is for your comfort and salvation; if we are comforted, it is for your comfort, which produces in you patient endurance of the same sufferings we suffer. 7 And our hope for you is firm, because we know that just as you share in our sufferings, so also you share in our comfort. 8 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. 9 Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. 10 He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, 11 as you help us by your prayers. Then many will give thanks on our behalf for the gracious favor granted us in answer to the prayers of many." ([2 Corinthians 1:3-11](#))

Figuratively speaking, the rigging and mast of a Christian fellowship is in the shape of a cross. Accordingly, Jesus says: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me." ([Matthew 16:24](#))

Pray for one another

"They [the believers] devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he 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](#))

"Pray continually." ([1 Thessalonians 5:17](#))

"Pray for each other so that you may be healed." ([James 5:16](#))

Sing and make music with one another

"Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord." ([Ephesians 5:19](#))

"Sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God." ([Colossians 3:16](#))

Comprehensive references: "together", "one another" and "each other"

"Now we ask you, brothers, to respect those who work hard among you, who are over you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their

work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers, warn those who are idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always try to be kind to each other and to everyone else. 16 Be joyful always; 17 pray continually; 18 give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not put out the Spirit's fire; 20 do not treat prophecies with contempt. 21 Test everything. Hold on to the good. 22 Avoid every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it. 25 Brothers, pray for us. 26 Greet all the brothers with a holy kiss. 27 I charge you before the Lord to have this letter read to all the brothers. 28 The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you." ([1 Thessalonians 5:12-28](#))

"Since, then, you have been raised with Christ, set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. 2 Set your minds on things above, not on earthly things. 3 For you died, and your life is now hidden with Christ in God. 4 When Christ, who is your life, appears, then you also will appear with him in glory. 5 Put to death, therefore, whatever belongs to your earthly nature: sexual immorality, impurity, lust, evil desires and greed, which is idolatry. 6 Because of these, the wrath of God is coming. 7 You used to walk in these ways, in the life you once lived. 8 But now you must rid yourselves of all such things as these: anger, rage, malice, slander, and filthy language from your lips. 9 Do not lie to each other, since you have taken off your old self with its practices 10 and have put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator. 11 Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all. 12 Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. 13 Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. 14 And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. 15 Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. 16 Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God. 17 And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him." ([Colossians 3:1-17](#))

5. Examples of a Christian Fellowship

I'd now like to end this message by giving us a task until next time we meet together, either for a worship meeting or another kind of gathering. Spend some private time reading the Bible, perhaps a letter to one of the churches in the New Testament. I can recommend to read Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians or Thessalonians. Try to figure out how the believers in the early churches give an example of a Christian fellowship and fellowshiping. Look for things that are important for individual members and the entire community of believers, and search yourselves whether one of the things mentioned applies to you or raises your attention to learn something new regarding "fellowshipping". If you like, please share your thoughts and insights later on with a Christian brother or sister.

For today I'm inviting you to sing two songs that stress the fact that we, hopefully all of us, are gathered "in one boat", supporting each other and growing together as fellow believers, as a Christian "family", to use another metaphor for a "fellowship". In our prayer time I'd like to ask you to give thanks for the things God has done for you personally to contribute to a Christian fellowship, and for our "church boat" as a collective. Also, before praying, spend some private time and identify the needs of each other and our congregation as a whole, and then pray for these in small groups. Eventually I will ask some of you to speak the closing prayer, before you are all welcome to join in for the coffee and tea fellowship ;-)

Music & Songs

Bind Us Together!
One Family

Thanksgiving & Prayers

Closing Prayer

Announcements

* Bible Study
Wednesday, 21 & 28 October at 19.00
Bastian's place

* Men's Night
Saturday, 7 November at 18.00
Patrick Nesbitt's place

* Thanksgiving Devotion & Potluck
Friday, 27 November at 18.00
Salvation Army

Invitation to Fellowship Time

Fellowship Time

Voluntary Offertory

(for God-child & Missionaries)

Cleaning Up