

THE FELLOWSHIP OF GLADNESS

*Last Sunday we had a couple visit us from N Z. It was the first time they had been in our fellowship. However, after the meeting, the husband mentioned to me several times, 'When I first came in ... I felt such a sense of the presence of God. There was a real **sense of freedom** among you.'* He later wrote on Facebook:

PLEASURE TO EXPERIENCE **THE FREEDOM AND LOVE** IN THE SERVICE LAST SUNDAY.
A WONDERFUL GRACE MESSAGE FELLOWSHIP.

*The wife also shared with me later and the husband agreed, 'Even before we got in the door, the lady that greeted us was so **warm and welcoming**. She added, 'Never before when coming into a church service have I felt so **welcome or such warmth**.'*

These comments and others like them are becoming more and more regular. They never cease to thrill me, especially since I know we have never ever tried to build a warm and friendly fellowship.

SO HOW IS THIS THING HAPPENING AMONG US ... WHAT IS THE SECRET TO THIS BLESSING?

LET'S LOOK AT THE FIRST NEW TESTAMENT FELLOWSHIP AT THE START OF THE EARLY CHURCH

A SERIES OF FORTUNATE EVENTS

Acts 2:42 & 44-47

*And they continued steadfastly in **the apostles' doctrine and fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

⁴⁴*Now all who believed were **together, and had all things in common (no hierarchy)**,*

⁴⁵*and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need **(looked after each other ... it became a loving and caring community)**.*

⁴⁶*So continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, **they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart**, ⁴⁷praising God and having favour with all the people. **(This spilled over into society and people liked them)**. And the Lord added ^{to} to the church daily those who were being saved.*

LOOK AT THEIR FELLOWSHIP ... **THEY WERE FILLED WITH GLADNESS!**

Verse 46: They went from house to house and *'ate their food with Gladness and simplicity of heart'*.

The word **'Gladness'** (agalliasei) means, **'Wild joy or ecstatic delight'**.

THEY WEREN'T STIFF AND INTENSE ... WITH LONG FACES ... SLIDE

THEY WERE FILLED WITH JOY AND GLADNESS SLIDE

THIS FELLOWSHIP WAS VERY ATTRACTIVE.

YOU COULDN'T KEEP PEOPLE AWAY ...

Acts 2:47 SLIDE

*Praising God and having **favour with all the people.** (This spilled over into society and people liked them.) And the Lord added to the church daily those who were being saved.*

IT WAS CONTAGIOUS ...

Outsiders looked in and wanted to be a part of this living group.

David said ...

Psalm 122:1 SLIDE

I was glad when they said to me, "Let us go into the house of the LORD".

ECSTATIC JOY

When my mum turned 93, as a fellowship, we arranged a surprise lunch for her. It was a wonderful time of celebration and gladness. Everyone was free, relaxed ... warm and friendly, and we all had a great time together.

So I found myself thinking, shouldn't our Sunday celebrations be even more like this – relaxed, warm, friendly ... full of joy and gladness?

What else was there ...?

They had a commonality ...

It was a community of life ...

This is what socialists try and create ... but they cannot ... history shows this ...

Acts 2:44 SLIDE

Now all who believed were **together, and had all things in common (no Heirachy), ⁴⁵ and ^(b)sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need (looked after each other ... it became a loving and caring community).**

WHERE DID THIS BLESSING COME FROM???

THERE ARE 2 IMPORTANT ANSWERS

Firstly they didn't achieve this fellowship by their own efforts.

No one had time to teach how to be in fellowship ... how to relate ... how to communicate ... be polite ... be hospitable ...

It was not a result of anyone teaching them to do this ...

YOU CANNOT TEACH THIS FELLOWSHIP ... OR TRY TO BUILD IT BY EFFORT ...

A pastor in a small country town was overseeing a fellowship which had grown to about 300 people as they rejoiced in the God of their salvation ... But then he focused on building a Christian community ... Within a year the church bombed out badly ... He ended up leaving and so did most of the people. The focus on Christian community wasn't the answer.

THE 2 REASONS WHY THE EARLY CHURCH FELLOWSHIP HAD SUCH GLADNESS AND BLESSING WHERE ...

1. They had the right message
2. They had the right Spirit

1. THEY HAD THE RIGHT MESSAGE **SLIDE**

*Acts 2:42 And they continued steadfastly in **the apostles' doctrine and fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.*

NB: THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE COMES BEFORE THE FELLOWSHIP OF GLADNESS.

THIS IS THE GOSPEL OF GRACE ... THE FINISHED WORK OF CHRIST. THE FIRST APOSTLE TO PREACH THIS WAS PETER ON THE DAY OF PENTECOST (ACTS 2).

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE WAS NOT THE LAW OF MOSES ... IT WAS THE GRACE AND TRUTH OF OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST.

When they came together ... they weren't yelled at and told how bad they were ... How they were sinners ... How they needed to live better lives ...

They weren't told how they were failing and made to feel guilty and condemned ...

They were taught what Christ had done for them.

THE APOSTLES DOCTRINE REVEALED THE FINISHED WORK OF THE CROSS ... JUSTIFICATION BY FAITH ... THE BLESSING OF GOD ... IT WAS INSPIRING AND ENCOURAGING.

You certainly won't have a fellowship of gladness if people are being constantly told how much they fail and how much they need to do ...

Our happy fellowship is the result of 'the Gospel of God' – the Gospel of Grace' (Acts 20:22) which we can't help but preach and teach every Sunday. And as a result we see people begin to let go of religion ... move out of condemnation and into acceptance ... Striving is replaced by rest and the Holy Spirit starts gently flowing through everyone's hearts like rivers of living water from their innermost being.

They also didn't come for *Entertainment ...*

social gatherings ... singles groups ... married groups ... marriage seminars ...

Not that these things are wrong or don't ever happen ... But this is not our focus.

BUT THERE WAS ANOTHER REASON THAT CREATED THIS HAPPY FELLOWSHIP

2. THEY HAD THE RIGHT SPIRIT **SLIDE**

DID YOU KNOW WHEN YOU FIRST RECEIVED CHRIST AS SAVIOUR AND LORD, YOU RECEIVED THE SPIRIT OF PERFECT UNITY?

1 Corinthians 12:13 **SLIDE**

*For by [in] **one Spirit** we were all baptized into **one body**—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.*

When you and I first believed ... our spirits were not only regenerated, but we were also divinely connected to each other person who had believed. We were translated into a divine body called 'The Body of Christ'.
The Body of Christ has only one Spirit ... the Holy Spirit!

Let's look at

Ephesians 4:3 **SLIDE**

Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

NB: YOU CAN'T KEEP SOMETHING WE DON'T HAVE.

WE ALREADY HAVE UNITY OF SPIRIT.

We see here we are encouraged to KEEP something we already have.

In Christ, we do not build unity and fellowship ... WE ALREADY HAVE IT.

LIKE ALL THINGS WE HAVE NOW COME INTO ... THIS UNITY ... THIS FELLOWSHIP ... HAS ALSO COME TO US BY HIS GRACE ... NOT BY OUR STRIVING.

WRONG PRAYING

We used to sing a prayer, 'Father make us one'.

We'd hold hands and sway and become sentimental but it was a totally unscriptural prayer.

It was based upon the prayer Jesus prayed in John 16

But it is an unscriptural prayer now.

All who receive Christ as their saviour ARE MADE ONE.

It's part of our New Creation spirit in the finished work of Christ.

THE BOND OF PEACE

We are all of one Spirit ... connected in the bond of peace.

Spiritually we have Peace with Each other ... there is no animosity in your new creation spirit ... with any other brother or sister in Christ.

HE [Jesus] is our peace who has broken down every wall of partition between

us ... (Eph 2:14)

This peace transcends all culture ... there is no racism here ...

This peace transcends all status ... there is no superiority or inferiority here ...

THEY CONTINUED IN FELLOWSHIP

Hebrews 10:25 **SLIDE**

Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.

FORSAKE = to desert ... to leave behind ... to neglect ... to treat as worthless ...

To forsake something you must already have it.

TO BE CONTINUED ...