

AN ACT OF FELLOWSHIP

Eph. 3:9

INTRODUCTION:

The word "Koinonia" which is translated fellowship occurs 18 times in the New Testament. When the connections in which it is used are examined, we discover a deep and a profound sense of meaning.

A jail door clangs shut. You heard the rattle and the key turns in the lock. James Ireland, 21 years old, a young Baptist preacher was locked in the Culpeper Jail. This happened more than (150 years ago) Baptists were getting started in Virginia. At that time it was against the law to preach the Gospel without (a license). It was difficult to get a license - you had to get it from the State. Your request had to be o. k.'d by a minister of the established church. And they didn't like Baptists.

When James Ireland appeared at Culpeper to preach that Sunday, a representative of the law came and said (if) you preach it will be my duty to put you in jail. He preached. He went to jail. But he wrote these words the night before - "I sat down and counted the cost - freedom or prison. And having ventured all upon Christ, I determined to suffer all for Christ." So he preached the Gospel of Jesus and went to jail. It was (no) modern jail. They burned sulphur in the doorway and nearly suffocated him. The bitter cold and unheated jail nearly ruined his health. And they kept him in jail from (November to April). And finally he was released a few days before his trial and went down to Williamsburg. Where he went to the Government and applied for a license to preach. And they said we can't give it to you unless you get a rector of an established church to sign it.

Finally, out in the country, he found a parish rector who signed his application. He went back to Williamsburg, got his license, went to Culpeper - just in time for the trial and when the charge was brought up - he submitted his license. And they let him go.

This is our sesquicentennial year and I think we need to think about this (venture of faith) and meditate on this fellowship which we have with these Christians of the past.

In a (Baptist Church) there is a communion table, there is a Bible on the pulpit, because Baptists hold that this is God's Word. There is usually a baptistery because we baptize by immersion. If there is no baptistery, the people go to a creek or to a river. And the minister lowers the candidate into the water, taking care that each is completely immersed.

Baptists observe The Lord's Supper and take the bread and the cup, they worship and serve Christ without any formal creed. They hold that each individual has a direct access to God.

Now these interesting (facts about Baptists) - all young people should know. There is so much to tell that the story needs to be told over and over again. There are many individual convictions.

I think there are some (basic principles) that make a Baptist a Baptist. This is a very intriguing statement. To focus on the things that Baptist which give us the impression that we are set apart. This truth with a destiny, a path, and a mission. There are four or five attributes a person must have

if he is going to be a Baptist.

First, a person must have a spiritual experience, a personal experience of God. Each person must answer himself the basic question. Have I had a personal encounter with God. Have I come to know him as the creator. Have I been confronted. Do I want to live by his teachings. Have I realized the meaning of Christ for my life. Have I had a spiritual birth.

The term "spiritual rebirth" is something that is bound up in this first principle that makes a man a new man. Having a new life and understanding faith.

Second, his trust in the Lord Jesus Christ and his authority is complete. That Christ is the head. That to me is given all authority in Heaven and in earth. And Jesus never said that he was going to give that to a bishop or to anyone else. And so his authority is shared with the person through the Holy Spirit. And anything that comes between God and the human soul is an intrusion.

Third, his personal faith in Jesus Christ and baptism upon that profession of faith. A man not born with his faith nor can it be gained for him by another. In the New Testament we read, those who confessed Christ - professed their faith and were added unto the church. A man cannot be born into a Christian family or into a family and be called a Christian. Or born into a

Christian country - that will not make him a Christian. Nor can he be made a Christian by somebody else. A man becomes a Christian by his own personal faith.

Fourth, his deep respect for the dignity of man. Baptists seeks to establish religious liberty for all men. That they may follow in sincere conscience their worship. And this is a matter of a democratic process. The freedom of man to worship as he will, is an objective Baptist.

You can decide - there is the Bible. In it God has given you a sufficient guide.

Fifth, he accepts the responsibility to bear witness to Christ. To practice religious freedom - the man should not only have the right to believe according to conscience, but he must have faith. We Baptists speak of the priesthood of believers. And this is something a man cannot keep to himself. If you are a believer - you want to tell it and bear witness. You want to share it publicly. You want it to be heard.

Now Baptists are in a great fellowship. And this is a fellowship that has been going for many many years.

The meaning of this word - first, it means a sharing of fellowship, Abiding in the company of others. Acts 2:42, 2 Cor. 6:14 - those who are friends of each other - that continue steadfastly in the apostles doctrine and fellowship, and in the breaking of bread, and in prayer.

1 - 6:14 doctrine

2) The word means practical sharing, with those less fortunate. Paul used this word for the collection he took from the churches of the poor Christians at Jerusalem. Romans 15:26, 2 Cor. 8:4. The Christian fellowship is a practical thing.

Third, the word is used to mean a partnership in the work of Christ. Phil. 1:5. For your fellowship in the Gospel from the first day until now. In the work of the Gospel we are partners across family and congregational lines.

Fourth, the word means a partnership in the faith. This means that the Christian is never an isolated unit. He is a believer in the family - the believing family. Eph. 3:9. To make all men see what is the fellowship or the mystery. And this is the mystery - that binds us together.

Therefore, the Christian κοινωνία is the bond which binds Christians to each other and to Christ. Let us joyfully celebrate our unity as Virginia Baptists.

In the early days in the First Baptist Church in Richmond, a young wife was convicted of her sins and decided she wanted to be baptized and join the Baptist church. On the appointed day she came down the stairs, dressed, ready to go. Her husband, had really not believed she would. His name was Archibald Thomas. One of the influential business leaders of Richmond. He looked at her and said, where are you going. She said, I am going to be baptized. They stared each other down and his eyes dropped first. Wait a minute, he said. He got his coat and hat, and she said - where are you going. He said if my wife

is going down to the outdoor baptism with all those Baptists to be mocked and laughed at - I am going with her to protect her--and they went. And John Courtney, the pastor of the church, preached by the baptismal place. He preached about conversion and the meaning of baptism. These words went home to the heart of Archibold Thomas. He stepped to the water's edge and said sir, is there any reason why I can't be baptized.

The pastor said, if you acknowledge Christ as your Saviour, you may. I do - he said. They called a business meeting of the male members of the church and they were the only ones that could vote then - and they voted to take Archibold Thomas in. And Archibold Thomas walked down with his wife into the waters of baptism and became a family. And for four generations have blessed the baptists of Virginia. This is a cherished heritage which we have. A person must have a spiritual and personal experience with God. A person must look to the authority of Jesus for his guidance and direction. A personal faith in Jesus will be followed by a baptism and that person will have deep respect for the dignity of man and finally, that person will become a witness and bear that responsibility in the fellowship. Indeed, perhaps today, you would like to join this kind of fellowship.