



KING'S CHAPEL

Daily Devotional - Philippians Study

Week 2 - Day 4

Introduction: Key Word Study

Today's devotional will focus on one key word from the book of Philippians that is foundational in helping to accurately understand the major themes that Paul highlights in this book. Sometimes it's helpful to read larger passages of scripture; sometimes we slow down and study smaller chunks. It can also be helpful and rewarding to focus on one particular key word that might not carry the same meaning in our culture today, so that we can understand the particular passage or book with more clarity. Martin Luther once famously said,

"I study my Bible as I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest might fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I shake the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb - study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters when they do not break the sense. Then I shake every twig, or a careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings."

This is the principle behind a key word study. Today we are looking at the greek word "koinonia" which is most often translated as "fellowship" in our English bibles. But the word fellowship doesn't carry the same weight or meaning that "koinonia" did to Paul's original audience. In order to understand the way Paul uses this word, and what he meant in addressing the churches he wrote to, we need to study its usage in a little more depth.

Bible Reading, Study & Meditation - "koinonia"

The greek word "koinonia" is used 18 times in the New Testament, mostly in Paul's letters. It shows up 3x's in the book of Philippians and is translated into English differently each time. By looking at a few of these passages and comparing them with its usage in other parts of the New Testament, we can get a more well rounded view of what this word means. Read the passages below and make a note or two of observation about each passage. The word highlighted in yellow is the word "koinonia" in the original greek.

- **Acts 2:42-47** - **42** And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and the **fellowship**, to the breaking of bread and the prayers. **43** And awe came upon every soul, and many wonders and signs were being done through the apostles. **44** And all who believed were together and had all things in **common**. **45** And they were selling their possessions and belongings and distributing the proceeds to all, as any had need. **46** And day by day, attending the temple together and breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts, **47** praising God and having favor with all the people. And the Lord added to their number day by day those who were being saved.

What were some of the things that characterized the "koinonia" or fellowship of the first Christians?

- **1 Cor. 1:9-10** - God is faithful, by whom you were called into the **fellowship** of his Son, Jesus Christ our Lord. I appeal to you, brothers, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that all of you agree, and that there be no divisions among you, but that you be **united in the same mind and the same judgment**.
- **1 Cor. 10:16-17** - The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a **participation** in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a **participation** in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.

Who or what do we have “koinonia” with in these passages? Does this change anything about the word “fellowship” for you?

- **Romans 15:25 - 27** - At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem bringing aid to the saints. For Macedonia and Achaia have been pleased to make some **contribution** for the poor among the saints at Jerusalem. For they were pleased to do it, and indeed they owe it to them. For if the Gentiles have come to **share** in their spiritual blessings, they ought also to be of service to them in material blessings.
- **Phil 3:8-10** - For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things and count them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which comes through faith in Christ, the righteousness from God that depends on faith-- that I may know him and the power of his resurrection, and may **share** his sufferings, becoming like him in his death.

How is the word “koinonia” used in these passages? Why could that be significant for the “fellowship of believers?”

- **Phil 1:3-5; 7** - I thank my God in all my remembrance of you, always in every prayer of mine for you all making my prayer with joy, because of your **partnership** in the gospel from the first day until now. It is right for me to feel this way about you all, because I hold you in my heart, for you are all partakers with me of grace, both in my imprisonment and in the defense and confirmation of the gospel.
- **Phil 2:1-2** - So if there is any encouragement in Christ, any comfort from love, any **participation** in the Spirit, any affection and sympathy, complete my joy by being of the **same mind**, having the **same love**, being in full accord and of **one mind**.

How would you describe the type of relationships that results from “koinonia” in these passages?

Use this space to summarize today’ observations about the different usages and meanings of the word “koinonia” What did you observe about this key word?

The Meaning of “Koinonia”

Koinonia (pronounced: coin- no-knee-ah) is an ancient Greek word with deep, rich meaning—a word that the New Testament writers knew well. It not only characterized Paul’s relationship with God, but it defined the type of intimate friendship and purposeful connection he had with fellow believers in the churches he helped plant. It’s also a word meant to define us today. So, what do we need to know about *koinonia* in order to experience it properly?

Koinonia = Fellowship The word “fellowship” is somewhat of an archaic word in the English language today. It is often used in twelve-step programs to express the time spent after an official meeting; and it is also used within the Christian church to speak about time spent among Christians outside of a church service. (Often with food involved!) But when was the last time you said to a friend from work, “Hey, do you want to go out and fellowship tonight?” Let’s face it, you just don’t.

In Acts 2:42, Luke gives his readers a description of some of the practices of the early church. He says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching, and to *fellowship (koinonia)*, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Most commentators note that the “apostles’ teaching” is something like Bible study or listening to a sermon. The commentators also agree that the “breaking of bread” is most likely shorthand for the Lord’s Supper. But what does Luke mean by “fellowship?”

Fellowship cannot be reduced to, as one writer suggests, “idle chitchat over steaming coffee before or after a worship service.” ***Fellowship, on the contrary, is gathering around what we believe and then living out that belief for the world to see.*** We believe the apostles’ teaching about Jesus’ death and resurrection; we come together around one table, breaking one loaf of bread to proclaim Christ’s death as a community; and we pray for our world, our city and our church. *Koinonia* for Luke, then, is the common Christian life recognized in belief and practice.

Koinonia = Partnership = (Friendship) In the Apostle Paul’s letter to the church at Philippi we get two more glimpses into the richness of the word *koinonia*. In the opening chapter of that letter he says that every time he prays to God, he prays with joy for the Philippians’ “...partnership (*koinonia*) in the gospel...” (1:5). Usually, when we think of the word “partnership,” it’s difficult for us to rid our minds of its use in the business world. Yet, we all understand what makes someone a partner: **a shared goal**. In the *Four Loves* C.S. Lewis captures this when he writes, “Lovers are normally face to face, absorbed in each other; [while] Friends [are] side by side, absorbed in some common interest.” Thus for Lewis: partnership = friendship! And what, according to Paul, was his and the Philippians’ friendship based on? The good news! The gospel of Jesus Christ.

Koinonia = Sharing (in something) Usually when Christians talk about the Holy Spirit, they do so by speaking about Him as though he were divided up into little tiny pieces and distributed among the community of faith. While it is not wrong to say “I have the Holy Spirit,” that statement doesn’t quite capture the profundity of what the Holy Spirit does. In Philippians 2, Paul gives us a glimpse into that profound mystery. There Paul writes, “If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any *fellowship (koinonia)* with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose.” In Paul’s very concise phrase (“if any fellowship with the Spirit”), he is reminding the church at Philippi that the reason they *are* a Christian community is because they share (*koinonia*) in the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit is the glue that joins them together *as* the community of faith.

Friendship, Partnership, & Sharing in the gospel become then for Paul the primary backdrop against which the out-workings of growing in Christ, suffering for, and defending the gospel must take shape.