

Fundamentals, Study 27. The Communion Of Saints (1 John 1:1-4)

by BS Poh

o The love between Christians, and between churches, is to be shown practically, without compromising the truth.

1. The Bible calls all true Christians *saints*. All saints are united to Jesus Christ by His Spirit and by their faith. This union is spiritual, vital (i.e. living), and real, although it does not make them one person with Him. They, therefore, share in His graces (i.e. spiritual characteristics), sufferings, death, resurrection, and glory.¹ Three things are true of them compared to non-believers. *First*, the fruit of the Spirit is seen more and more in their lives, e.g. love, joy, peace, kindness, compassion, and righteousness.² *Second*, they will experience trials and difficulties arising from their faith.³ *Third*, they have the expectation of being received by God into heaven.⁴ (1. John 1:16; 15:5; 1 John 1:3; Phil 3:10; Rom 6:5-6; 2. Gal 5:22-25; 2 Pet 3:18; 2 Cor 3:18; 3. Rom 8:17; 2 Tim 3:12; James 1:2, 12; 4. John 14:1-4; 17:24-26;)

2. By their union with Christ, all believers are spiritually united to one another.⁵ They have a love for one another that cannot be accounted for otherwise. They share in one another's gifts and graces, and are obligated to do good to one another, both on the personal level as well as the corporate level. On the *personal* level they are to help, encourage, and pray for other believers who are in need.⁶ On the *corporate* level, they are to relate to one another as members of the same church, and as members of one church with those of another church.⁷ God saves people *individually*, in order that they may live *communally*, as members of local churches. Every true Christian ought to commit himself to the membership of a good local church. That is why Christians are described as members of Christ's body, living stones in the temple of God, and children in God's household.⁸ (5. John 17:23; 1 John 4:7-11; 6. 1 Thess 5:11; 1 John 3:17-18; 7. Rom 1:12; Gal 6:10; Eph 4:15-16; 1 Cor 12:7; 3:12-13; 8. 1 Pet 2:5; Heb. 12:7)

3. Needs vary, the ability to meet those needs differ, and the opportunity to meet the needs of others is never the same among believers. It is therefore unavoidable that *selective fellowship* is practised. The Lord practised selective fellowship: choosing seventy to send out two by two;⁹ choosing twelve to be His disciples;¹⁰ taking only three disciples with Him on certain occasions;¹¹ and specially loving one disciple.¹² A Christian will first help the members of his own church, then the members of like-minded churches, before extending help to members of other churches.¹³ The *communion of the saints* does not destroy or infringe the right of personal ownership.¹⁴ Some groups err by advocating communal living of the kind that denies the right of private property, infringes the liberty of conscience, and leads to spiritual bondage. (9. Luke 10:1; 10. Luke 9:1; 11. Matt 17:1; 26:37; Mark 5:37; 13:3; 12. John 20:2; 21:7, 20; 13. 1 Tim 5:4, 8; Gal 6:10; Acts 11:29-30; 14. Acts 5:4; Eph 4:28)

4. Just as members of a local church have an obligation to strengthen and help one another, churches also have a similar obligation towards one another. The *communion of saints*, and the *communion of churches*, should never be exercised at the expense of truth.¹⁵ We have a duty to

obey God, and to be faithful to His word. Selective fellowship between churches has, therefore, to be exercised on the basis of truth. The more truth we are agreed upon, the closer will be the fellowship, and vice versa. This is ignored by the *ecumenical movement*, which practises fellowship that compromises truth. Separation from sin, heresy and worldliness is commanded of us.¹⁶ (15. Eph 4:1-6; 16. 2 Cor 6:14-18; Gal 1:8-9; 2:14; 1 John 2:16)

= How blessed is the person who trusts in the Lord. Come, trust in Him!

Review Questions

1. Who are the *saints*?
2. Describe the union of believers with Christ using three words.
3. How are believers united to one another?
4. How does the *communion of saints* work out on the *personal* level?
5. How does the *communion of saints* work out on the *corporate* level?
6. Why has *selective fellowship* to be practised?
7. What right is not denied or infringed by the *communion of saints*?
8. Why mustn't the *communion of saints* and the *communion of churches* be exercised at the expense of truth?
9. How does truth affect the fellowship between churches?
10. What is wrong with the *ecumenical movement*?

Assignment/Discussion

How may we express communion between churches: (i) in times of peace; (ii) in times of natural disaster?

Memory Passage (John 17:20-21)

20 "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; 21 that they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me.

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