



# 2023 Weekly Devotions

Week of: October 9<sup>th</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup>

Sermon: October 8<sup>th</sup>



SMYRNA BAPTIST CHURCH  
building community • equipping believers • serving Jesus



October 9

### 1 Corinthians 1:9-10

I want to begin this week of “points to ponder” with a staggering and absolutely incredible statement – The goal of the whole gospel is to create a *fellowship*. There is of course the perfect unity and oneness that exists within the Trinity that demonstrates the fellowship between the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. By God’s grace, we have the possibility of being called in to fellowship with the Godhead. The Bible says, “God is faithful, through whom you were called into fellowship with His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). As we believe in the gospel, we are received into the fellowship of the family of God.

It is important that we understand at the outset that this fellowship is not optional. If you are a born again believer, you will walk in partnership with others in the fellowship, and you will share commonalities with them as you serve with and love them as you do life as family. Now, please keep in mind that I am not talking about a loose, virtually nonexistent connection with a group of people with whom we “go to church.” Genuine fellowship, as it is to be understood from Scripture, is both communion with God and with the people of God. The Greek word is *koinonia*. Within the New Testament, specifically in Acts 2:42, we are told that the early believers continually devoted themselves to fellowship, meaning they had all things in common and shared life together. It is within this fellowship, this oneness, that they encouraged one another to faithfulness, obedience, and good works. The idea of going into a church building, sitting down, listening to the sermon and singing, and then walking out was foreign to the early church.

When Paul wrote to the Corinthian church telling them that as a result of their salvation, they were called into fellowship with Jesus, it was to be understood that meant into communion with Christ in order to obtain eternal life. From John’s writing in 1 John 1, we learned that we were called into fellowship upon hearing and receiving the gospel which leads to eternal life, which in turn produces joy within the fellowship. John said that they shared the truth of Jesus Christ and the gospel, “so that you too may have fellowship with us...so that our joy may be made complete” (1 John 1:3-4). That is an astounding statement and one that must not be overlooked or taken lightly.

Dear ones, do you see that, as Paul wrote to the Corinthians, we were called into fellowship? We were not called to be saved and then to go on our merry way totally absent or isolated from the local church. Our fellowship begins with our inclusion into the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Before you fall into error and believe that is enough, look to what John wrote in 1 John 1. “If we say that we have fellowship with Him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth; but if we walk in the Light as He Himself is in the Light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus His Son cleanses us from all sin” (vv.6-7). Evidence that we are walking in fellowship with Jesus Christ is that we are also walking in fellowship with other Christians. We were called into fellowship with Christ AND with the rest of His children.

Our communities are sadly full of churches where the “fellowship” is a far cry from what saved people are called into. Brothers and sisters, we are called into relationships in which we truly share life together because we have commonalities that bind us together at a heart level. We all stood in need of a Savior. We were all equally lost and had to come to Christ the same way. It was His mercy and grace that saved us. We all had to agree with God that we were hopeless sinners, deserving of divine judgment, and all had to repent and run to Him for forgiveness and grace. The fellowship into which we have been called is the difference maker at Smyrna.

October 10

**Titus 1:4**

In this short letter written by Paul to Titus, we learn that it is likely Paul led Titus to faith in Jesus, trusted him greatly with ministry, and loved him like a son. In the opening remarks of the letter, Paul refers to Titus as his own child who shared in a "common faith." I want to focus our attention on this phrase today to be sure we view ourselves, in relation to one another, as no better or no worse than the others who are called into this sweet fellowship with Jesus and His redeemed.

Yesterday, I wrote about the reality of the "fellowship" into which we are called. This fellowship is a real, tangible, living entity that is formed by a kinship that is shared through the finished work of Christ on the cross and His invitation to us to be a part of the fellowship. It is not nebulous, and it is not pretend. It is a group of people who live in communion with the Godhead, who share life together, serve together, and who love the Lord and the others genuinely. You can touch it, you can see it, you can experience, and you are swept up in its wonder and grace. There is a beauty to this fellowship that is winsome, attractive, and beneficial to all who live within it. This fellowship is made up of people who come from all walks of life. Those who are wealthy and those who are poor are equally welcome. The old and young, the home folk as well as the foreigner, the black, white, Asian, Hispanic, European, and the American are all invited. There is only one stipulation that makes this fellowship exclusive.

Paul addressed Titus as his true child in a common faith (Titus 1:4). Our faith is indeed a common faith because it is the same faith that has been handed down by the saints (Jude 3) as it was originally delivered by Jesus Christ. I touched on this at the end of the point to ponder yesterday, but I want to remind you that we all get into the fellowship the same way. I am reminded here of Paul's writing in Romans 3 where he, in an attempt to eliminate pride, arrogance, and attitudes of superiority, taught that both Jews and Gentiles were all sinners (v. 9). He then writes that the righteousness of God came to all the same way – through faith in Jesus Christ and that there is no difference in that regard between any of us (v. 22). When I get to see a young man come to Jesus with his clothes a little baggy, his eyes kind of tired, and his face a little worn, my heart fills to overflowing at the mercy of God to receive his soul into the Kingdom and into the fellowship. In that moment, he is no less precious, valuable, welcomed, and deserving than the one who comes to Jesus in perfect clothing, money in the bank, and a reputation that is stellar. In the eyes of Jesus, and in the eyes of this fellowship, there is no distinction between the two but only rejoicing over the salvation and inclusion of one who was lost and now is found.

Beloved, it is necessary in the *fellowship* that Jesus calls us into to have this mindset. What makes our church so special at this point is an understanding of this truth. No one is better than the next person and no one deserves to be here anymore than another. All of this is by grace and mercy and as long as we keep this in mind and live in light of this truth, we should remain humble before the Lord and accepting, understanding, and encouraging to one another. Our faith is a common faith, and it will always be. It is common in that it will never change, and it is the only way into the fellowship of the Lord Jesus and His bride. Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father but through Me" (John 14:6). I am thankful that even with my faults and my scars, my strengths and my weaknesses, you sweet family, love me still. May it be true for all of us!

October 11

**1 Corinthians 12:4-7, 11-14, 18**

Today I want us to consider another obvious indicator that God's plan for Christians is to be in fellowship with other believers. This "community" is to be strengthened and enjoyed by serving in it as well as loving those with whom you fellowship. The Bible teaches us that God has granted spiritual gifts to everyone He saves. In his letter to the Corinthians Paul wrote, "But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good" (1 Cor. 12:7). The gifts given to each of us as children of God, are meant to be utilized in the life of the fellowship to build up the body by making the Spirit known among us. Notice that Paul says the gifts are from the Holy Spirit and serve to make Him known (manifest).

Think how illogical it is to believe that God has given you a gift that helps to strengthen the body of Christ AND to make Him known, and you choose to stay out of the fellowship as if it isn't really necessary for a Christian to be a part of the local church. The statement, "You don't have to go to church to be a Christian," is often quoted by those who claim to be Christian but who choose not to actually go to church, reveals that they are either not saved or living in open rebellion against God. I assume they are simply ignorant of this truth and not willfully disobedient. Maybe I am being too kind.

The passage chosen for today is from Paul's letter to the Corinthians about spiritual gifts. At one point he says, "One and the same Spirit works all these things, distributing to each one individually just as He wills" (1 Cor. 12:11). Ponder this thought today: would He choose to give a gift to a member, intended to be a vital and necessary part of the whole, and then not care if that "piece" ever showed up? Think of how selfish and no caring is the attitude that a person holds who chooses never to bless the rest of us with a gift that the Holy Spirit chose to give that person for their joy and the benefit of all the rest of us. The more I write this today, the more ludicrous it is and the more irritated I feel towards them.

Spiritual gifts are like every other resource that God has entrusted to us, His children, to steward for His glory, our joy, and the well-being of others. To avoid the "fellowship" is to be guilty of not serving the Lord with your talents. The parable that Jesus told in the book of Matthew 25:14-30 should be applied to the topic of spiritual gifts being neglected within the fellowship of believers. It was the two servants who utilized what the Master had given them who were commended with the words, "Well done, good and faithful servant...enter into the joy of your Master." Conversely, the steward who was given a gift but failed to utilize it for kingdom growth was condemned and ultimately cast into hell. This is no light matter.

Friends, the Spirit of God purposefully equipped us to be plugged into the body of Christ to serve. There are commandments given that should be adequate motivation for obedience, but if that isn't enough there is more. Serving with other brothers and sisters in the fellowship is a marvelous way to enjoy church. As we serve together, there is a spirit of "family" that is forged between us. We genuinely grow to love each other, to care for one another, and to willingly sacrifice to make sure that we are all making it. When everybody is pulling in the same direction the work is so much easier and efforts more fruitful. God's design is perfect for all parties involved. We all suffer when a believer chooses not to show up, but no one suffers as much as the one missing the sweetness of the fellowship. It is a well-oiled machine when operating as our Designer planned it.

October 12

**John 17:11, 21-23**

Go with me into the 17<sup>th</sup> chapter of the Gospel of John for a while. Stand with Jesus there, and His disciples, just outside the temple looking east across the Kidron valley to the side of the Mt. of Olives. Some precious conversation was held between Christ and His disciples beginning in John 14 where He is telling them not to be troubled even though their time together was quickly coming to an end, this side of heaven. This is the night on which He will spend their last evening in the Garden of Gethsemane. Just prior to walking across the valley onto the Mt. of Olives and into the Garden, He prays.

The prayer that Jesus lifts to the Father is commonly known as the high priestly prayer of Jesus. In it, He talks to the Father about His impending death, His love for His followers and His desire that the Father take care of them while He is on the cross and in the grave, His unity with the Father, and His love for those who would become followers in the future. There is more, but that is the heart of it. Within that prayer is this verse, "...Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as we are" (John 17:11). Then a little later in His prayer He says, "...that they (believers) may all be one; even as You, Father, are in Me and I in You, that they may also be in Us, so that the world may believe that You sent Me. The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one...that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may know that You sent me and loved them" (John 17:21-23). How can this be if we are not in fellowship one with another?

We are standing with Jesus; He is emotional and serious as He knows their time is short. He talks with them and then talks to the Father. His heartfelt prayer is that we, as His followers, would be unified as one body; That we would exemplify in our relationships with each other the same oneness as He, the Father, and the Spirit share together in intimate fellowship. This clearly involves life together on a regular and ongoing basis. It involves knowing each other, serving each other, supporting, and strengthening each other. What is at stake in our call to this fellowship with the Trinity and the body of Christ?

The answer is the very essence of God's plan of redemption. Twice in this prayer Jesus asks the Father to make us unified as one, "So that the world may know that He was sent by God" to save us. Brothers and sisters, our relationships within the fellowship are intended to look so much like that which the Father and Son share that we give credibility to our Christian claims of the incarnation and His plan to save us. Our worship of God together, along with our service to Him and each other as well as our love for each other within the fellowship of believers is beautiful and it is meant to be attractive. This is another reason why we need all hands on deck so that the body functions well. Remember that the Holy Spirit put all the pieces together and expects that all are working to take care of the family as well as advance the kingdom in order to draw more to it.

I will close by beating the drum once more for church attendance and togetherness with the others who are called by God into this fellowship. How on earth does a person think they can experience the beauty of oneness and unity if they are not even here? Let me say as lovingly as I can, there is more at stake than your preferences and personality. We are called into fellowship, and we have been prayed over by Jesus Christ into unity and oneness so that others will know the message that we speak is valid and true.

October 13

### Philippians 2:1-5

Understand that the “fellowship” I am writing about this week is a result of Christ calling us into fellowship with Him as well as with one another. It flows from intimacy with Christ and surrender to His will and Lordship. The sweetness of the relationships is fostered by sacrifice and service in life lived out together. This fellowship is not superficial, nor is it fake. It ultimately flows into and out of the lives of people who love Jesus and walk in obedience to Him. The more we honestly love Jesus, the more we will sincerely love people. You don’t force it and you don’t have to pretend. It simply becomes a lifestyle that is infectious, attractive, and enticing to others who get a taste of it.

In Philippians 2, Paul describes the life that I am attempting to capture and paint in words for you this week as “the attitude of Christ” (v.5). Some translations say, “Have the very mind of Christ in you.” Beloved, our model, Jesus Christ, lived it out in front of us on the pages of Scripture. Paul exhorted the Philippian believers, whom he loved deeply, to live like Christ. That would include, as he wrote in verses 3 and 4, doing nothing from a place of selfishness with self-serving motives. We are to live with and do life with people not trying to bring glory to ourselves. Our actions should be filled with humility flowing from gratitude for our salvation and the mercy and grace that God has bestowed upon us through the years. We are told to regard one another as more important than ourselves, which is the basic definition of true humility. Folks, when I see myself as a sinner saved by grace, I am humbled. When I ponder the depths of my own sin, I am amazed. I am won over and captured by His love for me. I love Him because He first loved me.

Few of us can look at our schedules these days and say we are not busy in one way or another. Our plates are full, the demands are great, the free moments are scarce, and fatigue is real. In the midst of that reality, we hear this, “Do not merely look out for your own personal interests, but also for the interests of others” (v. 4). Do you want to say, “Really God. With all that I have to do, You want me to worry about their needs too?” He would answer, “Yes.”

To respond with concern for others in the throes of our own responsibilities and desires is not natural. Something must happen “to us” to cause us to care about people in a way that resembles the Father’s love for them. That “something” is the presence and influence of the indwelling Holy Spirit who changes our priorities, our passions, and our purposes for our lives. In other words, we have to be saved and transformed into His likeness. Again, Paul said, “Have the attitude of Christ in you.” This can only happen when you are saved.

Take note of how Paul begins chapter 2 of Philippians. Many translations use the word “if” in verse 1 which is fine, but another possible way to read it in Greek is to say, “Since”. It would read like this, “Since there is encouragement in Christ, since there is consolation of love, since there is fellowship of the Spirit, and since there is affection and compassion....” This means simply, since you are saved and filled with the Spirit, be like Jesus. We can believe based on what we read here, that the Spirit will work in the life of the believer in these ways. When you are faced with decisions to make regarding being self-absorbed or selfless, the Spirit will whisper words of encouragement into your heart and mind. Consolations of love are the whispers of cheer or counsel into the mind of His child. The Spirit fellowships with us in real ways and creates in us affections and compassions for others because we experience His compassion and affection for us. All of this is supposed to result in unity among His people in the fellowship of the body of Christ. So, my simple point today is that if you are truly saved, this is how the Spirit walks with you and encourages you to act like Jesus.

October 14

**John 20: 30-31**

John began his letter entitled 1 John with a retelling of actual experiences that he and the other disciples had with Jesus Christ. He uses language that resonates with the reader. Phrases like, "We heard Him," "We have seen with our eyes," "We have looked at and touched Him with our hands." These realities are meant to serve as validation for the testimony that he is about to give pertaining to the work of Christ. John is attempting to bring the reader back to the basic tenets and fundamentals of the Christian faith and he does that by convincing the reader from eyewitness testimony. John is saying to us, "This is not hearsay or second-hand information; I was there and I saw and experienced every bit of it." John was attempting to manifest Jesus to us through testimony of the truth that was manifest (made known) to him in person (1 John 1:2).

There is a strong consensus among scholars that the author of 1 John is the apostle who wrote the Gospel of John. I find it very convincing that he begins 1 John the way he drew the gospel of John to a close. In John 20:30-31 he writes, "Therefore many other signs Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples; which are not written in this book; but these things have been written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name." Isn't that wonderful? John is telling us that everything he was inspired to write was meant to convince us of who Jesus was and ultimately to find "life" in Him. Our faith is rooted dear ones in actual, and in many cases verifiable, history.

This method of utilizing real life and real history as proof of God's faithfulness, omniscience, power, and so forth, as reasons for our own faithfulness and trust is not uncommon to the Scriptures nor is it uncommon to our modern lives. We trust certain people because we have history with them and because they have proven themselves trustworthy, dependable, honest, and such. In Deuteronomy 4 Moses writes, "To you it was shown that you might know that the Lord, He is God" (Deut. 4:35). Time and time again Moses admonished the people to remember their experiences with God so that they would be motivated to keep on trusting Him. Likewise, a short time later Joshua used the same technique to spur them to faithfulness. He wrote, "And you have seen all that the Lord your God has done to all these nations because of you; for the Lord your God is He who has been fighting for you" (Joshua 23:3). His past is part of the reason we can trust Him for our future.

Church family, do you have a story to tell about your walk with God and His faithfulness through the years? I hope that today you will reflect on your journey and ask God to help you see the times that He has been right there with you – seeing you through. Then, when you talk about Him to others, you can simply tell them of His faithfulness in your own testimony as convincing proof of why they should follow Him too. If you feel as if you don't have much to tell, I suggest that you listen to those who do, be inspired by their stories, and then set out to walk with God faithfully to create your own. A strong reason why I personally feel confident in my faith is because of the journey getting here.

I recall seasons of fruitfulness and seasons of dryness. I felt His presence so close that I literally felt His touch. I have heard His "voice" in my mind, and have experienced His comfort, conviction, patience, and love in ways that take my breath away. It is hard to doubt for long periods of time when all you have to do is remember. Like John, I hope that we can all say to any who will listen, "I tell you my story so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you too may have life in His name."



October 15

**Genesis 2:18; Romans 12:5**

We will close this week of “points to ponder” getting back to where we started. The Lord has impressed upon my own heart this week a greater understanding of the value and the biblical mandate of being actively engaged in the “fellowship” into which we are called upon our salvation. People often ask pastor Aaron and I what we are doing here at Smyrna that is drawing such a crowd. We are always quick to credit God and His favor as well as the church’s faithfulness to the preaching and teaching of His Word. If there is a “secret sauce” beyond those two convictions, it is the fellowship that has become so sweet in our church.

I would dare say that the majority of churches in existence today gather in various places of various sizes, with various convictions, but who are not together in a practical way. What I mean by that is simply that they may gather under the same roof for “church,” but they are not unified at a heart level. John MacArthur has written and spoken about what he calls “positional unity” without “practical unity.” By positional, he is referring to our position in Christ as born again believers. Positionally, we are adopted into the family of God and thereby included in the fellowship of believers. It probably goes without saying but let me remind you that not all who claim to know Jesus as Lord actually do. But, for our discussion today, we will assume that some are positionally unified children of God.

When MacArthur suggests that many are not practically unified, he is referring to the absence of the sweetness, closeness, and togetherness of genuine, biblically defined fellowship. He is referring to the churches in which members show up and then leave when the service is over. They are members who do not truly know each other and who do not share life together in practical ways. Remember earlier this week when I wrote about true fellowship being that which includes serving together and growing in real love for one another. It is the love that leads to what we saw from Philippians 2. I would argue that positional unity is called into question when there is no evidence of practical unity.

From the beginning of time, it was God’s teaching that man should not be alone. In Genesis 2:18 it is written, “Then the Lord God said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; I will make him a suitable helper.’” Dear ones, we cannot possibly be all that God desires us to be as it relates to ministry, service, sharing, and reflecting His character to others if we isolate ourselves from the very ones, to whom we are to shine His light. It is not possible for us to try to be the body of Christ alone. We are only one piece of it and need all the other pieces to function as we were designed. Can you imagine what a pinky toe would look like hopping around disconnected from the rest of the body. It would look ridiculous, it would make no sense, and it would be for all practical purposes, useless. Put in its proper place alongside the rest of the toes and connected to the foot, it looks right, it makes sense, and it becomes clearly valuable to the whole.

Paul wrote to the Christians in Rome these words, “So we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another” (Romans 12:5). Here again, we are united as one “in Christ,” which MacArthur would say is positional, and then we are also to be united practically as one because we are members one of another. This means we are connected as family. Family does life together! In a real sense, we are not our own because we have been bought with a price (1 Cor. 6:20). We exist in this family of God for Him and for each other. We belong to each other, and we belong together. I am so thankful I get the joy of doing life with you.