Koinonia (Fellowship) as Framed in Scripture- Dr. Rick Weinert NWC Rural Webinar- May 11, 2022

Question: Biblically- What are the values/functions of the gathered body of believers?

That’s probably a bigger question than it first appears to be. When we first think of values and functions of the fellowship of believers probably the first things that come to mind are the practices of the early church. They came together for worship, teaching, communion, baptism, fellowship, and prayer, as well as caring for one another and providing for the needs of those less fortunate. Paul’s instructions about communion in 1 Corinthians 11 reveal that it is a corporate practice, not a private practice. The Psalms are filled with corporate worship. The Psalmist’s longing in Psalm 122 was to come into the House of the LORD with the congregation.

Teaching in the New Testament, whether by Jesus, or by his disciples, is almost always in a group setting. Even the Pauline Epistles personally addressed to Timothy and Titus were intended to be read to the gathered church. Baptism is a testimony of faith, so it’s done where there are others to observe. The Ethiopian Eunuch seems to be alone, but as an official of the Ethiopian Queen, it is not likely that he is traveling alone. His baptism was probably before witnesses. So, worship, teaching, communion, and baptism are all corporate functions of the church.

According to Hebrews 10:19-25 drawing near to God and holding fast our faith necessitates meeting together. Verse 24 challenges us to “consider how to stir up one another to love and good works.” That whole paragraph is plural, not singular. When the author of Hebrews talks about drawing near to God, our hearts being sprinkled clean, and “holding fast the confession of our hope without wavering,” none of that is done on our own. It is all plural.

The phrase “one another” is used 100 times in the NT. Almost 60 of those are what we call “One Another Commands.” None of those commands can be kept alone. In fact, Romans 12:5 and Eph 4:25 both note that we are “members one of another.” So, what does that mean to be members one of another? That question could lead to a long discussion.

Fellowship is a key part of body life within the church. Fellowship cannot be done alone. What we often call fellowship, an exchange about the weather, the fishing outlook, or maybe hunting stories, probably doesn’t actually qualify as fellowship, but even that can lead to fellowship. Fellowship doesn’t necessarily need to be talking about the Bible. Fellowship means doing life together. It involves a certain level of intimacy, transparency, and accountability, although that will likely look different in rural settings than in urban settings.

Fellowship is also tied to prayers. When we talk about prayer we almost always think about private prayer, but corporate prayer is important. We need to be praying together as a body. We need to be praying for one another. We need to be praying together for our community. We need to be praying for the sick. James says that if someone is sick, they should call for the elders to pray. That’s corporate body life.

We also need to learn how to be listening together to the Spirit. We could spend a long time on this but hearing from the Spirit is not just a private thing. In Acts 13, “while they were worshiping the Lord and fasting, the Holy Spirit said, ‘Set apart for me Barnabas and Saul for the work to which I have called them.’” They responded by laying hands on them and sending them off. Two chapters later the conclusion of the Jerusalem Council in Acts 15 was this, “It seemed good the Holy Spirit and to us.” All of that was done corporately.

Additionally, ministry was almost always a team effort in the New Testament. Peter, when he was released miraculously from prison in Acts 12, immediately went to find a group of believers who were praying together. In Acts 10, when Peter had a vision and went to share the gospel with Cornelius and his family, he didn’t go alone. Along with him went some of the Brothers from Joppa. He had a team. Paul had Barnabas and a team of others. Service and ministry are almost always group exercises rather than private, personal events.

Ultimately, I think, the value of fellowship is love. Love and unity are what convince the world that God sent Jesus and that we are his disciples. Love is demonstrated and experienced in worship, teaching, communion, baptism, fellowship, One-another commands, prayer, service, and ministry. One of the things that Covid has done is reveal how much we really need each other. I can’t tell you how many conversations I have had about people dying alone over the past two years. The isolation caused by fear of Covid has caused immeasurable damage in the area of mental health. Even us introverts who have done fairly well over the past two years have begun to recognize that we do need people. I think we like to talk about love, but we sometimes fail to realize that we can’t love alone. Neither can we be a church alone. Worship, teaching, communion, baptism, fellowship, One-another commands, prayer, service, and ministry are all corporate activities.