

WCCC 2023

Brother Ted Peng

**God makes known His manifold wisdom
through the church (3)**

Thank our brother for the songs we just sang. We ought to love the Lord, and we ought to love each other. Thank the Lord for that. Only in His house can that happen.

Let us read a few verses.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life—

1 John 1:1

I want to underline this: the Word of life is the Life Himself, Christ Jesus Himself.

The life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us—

1 John 1:2

So he was saying that which was from the beginning , that life is now manifested to us.

that which we have seen and heard we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship with us; and truly our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ.

1 John 1:3

This life that the Lord has given us, which we have handled with our own hands, we fellowship unto you.

These 3 verses are apostle John saying how the source of all this is the life of Christ, and how important this is. He said, this life is what we have seen, we have heard, and we have handled with our hands. He is saying that this has not been taught to us - that is what we have seen and handled with our own hands.

So he is giving us a picture of that wonderful life, originally given to us, which was the beginning of all things, we have touched it, and now we want to give it to you. The original was the life of the Son and the life of the Father. In the very origin there was this fellowship between the Father and the Son. Thank the Lord that the apostles have seen and handled this life. Now they have been brought into this fellowship.

He is saying now we are passing this thing on to you, so that you can also fellowship with the Father and the Son. And now you can also fellowship with us - those who have seen Christ Jesus with our own eyes.

Dear brothers and sisters, according to the apostle John, this is the meaning of fellowship. The central content of this fellowship is the life of Christ. When we enter this fellowship we see the Father is there, the Son is there. And these fellow brothers and sisters who have been brought into that fellowship by the life of Christ, now we see them also.

So this is the apostle John's own experience with the life of Christ, and his experience with this fellowship. He thinks it is so important he wants us all to get in.

I want to also read a few verses on how the apostle Paul views this fellowship. This is apostle Paul writing to the Corinthian brothers and sisters.

God is faithful, by whom you were called into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

1 Corinthians 1:9

He saw a fellowship - this is the fellowship of the Son of God. The Son of God is Jesus Christ our Lord. He was writing to the Corinthian brothers and sisters, telling them that the church in Corinth is the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord.

When we come to the Lord's table on Sunday, Paul says it is a fellowship.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?

1 Corinthians 10:16

In the eyes of Paul, breaking bread together is fellowship.

Then let us see 2 Corinthians 8:4. There he is saying that when we give to needy saints, that is fellowship. The Macedonian church had asked Paul and his co-worker to accept their gifts to the poor:

implored us with much urgency that we would receive the gift and the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

2 Corinthians 8:4

So the apostle Paul sees the giving of gifts to brothers and sisters in need as, in the Chinese translation, as “having a part of”, while the English translation is fellowship. Fellowship is more than just “having a part” in the giving. It means being engaged in. My heart and mind is in it. This is the apostle Paul talking about the giving of gifts.

He also thinks that the gospel is fellowship. Being engaged in the gospel is fellowship. This is in Philippians 1:5.

for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now,
Philippians 1:5

The Chinese translation says being in one heart and mind. I actually like the Chinese translation better. To be in one heart and mind to make the gospel prosperous.

That is not the end of the story. Paul also thinks that to suffer with Christ is fellowship.

that I may know Him and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being conformed to His death,
Philippians 3:10

The apostle Paul thinks that to suffer with Christ is fellowship. The Chinese translation reads “to know” the suffering of Christ. But brothers and sisters, to fellowship in that is more than just knowing. It means to enter into it with the same heart and mind.

By the Lord’s mercy, if we have suffered with Christ, you know that it is more than just knowledge. It is quite deep, getting deep into our hearts. And after that you are a different person.

So fellowship is a very wonderful word. And that is not all to it. Regarding the matter of the eternal purpose of God as a mystery, the apostle Paul thinks that there is a fellowship in there. It means that we, now, ought to really engage in that. We need to know the eternal purpose of God, and we also have to know that it has to do with me and my life. It has to do with our life together. That has to do with the house of God. That has to do with the body of Christ.

So the word “fellowship” is almost unlimited in what it means. If you engage in, if you love the Lord, you fellowship with Him.

and to make all see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ;
Ephesians 3:9

Now this mystery is the mystery about the eternal purpose of God, because the verse immediately after that is one that we have read many times.

to the intent that now the [d] manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church to the [e] principalities and powers in the heavenly places,
Ephesians 3:10

Paul means that once you know the eternal purpose of God you need to be engaged in it. It is not just a sentence in the book of Ephesians. It is not just a thought being talked about by the elder brothers. It is something for us to fellowship in.

Dear brothers and sisters, when you read this, you know that to both apostles John and Paul, this fellowship is something that is real they see from God, made real in their own lives and that of brothers and sisters. The fellowship means more than just knowing, being engaged in, having a part in.

You know that the apostle Paul, when he mentions fellowship, he has so much in mind. If we know that and consider these many things: ministering to the saints, the gospel, suffering with Christ, God's eternal purpose, the Lord's table, now your feeling is different. And you will say, "yes I am part of it. Our brothers and sisters are all part of it." This is how the apostle Paul sees this.

The brothers gave me the assignment to share on the second part of the eternal purpose of God - that the church ought to be a testimony of God's wisdom. Through the church, the principalities and authorities in heavenly places can now see the manifold wisdom of God.

Simply put, the church ought to be a testimony of God's wisdom. All these people in the principalities and heavenly places are wiser than us. It takes us a lot of time to learn these things, but they see that. When they see this group of people - how they live, how they gather, how they fellowship with each other - they say "God is right".

This is why we thanked the Lord for the example of the Philadelphia church in our first session. I believe that God is not looking for perfection. God is looking for each one of us. And as time goes on, more and more of us. We love the Lord and walk with Him, and get hold of His purpose and live according to that, and be a blessing to people around.

I think this is why the Philadelphia church is such an encouragement to us. It is a real church in history, not very large but very small, and the Lord finds what He wants there.

Now we also mentioned in the first session, if you look at what Paul is writing in Ephesians 1, he talks about the eternal purpose of God and the heavenly inheritance being together, in the span of 3 verses. Verses 10-12. He also tells us that the inheritance we receive from heaven has a purpose, so that we who have first hoped can now be to the praise and glory to God. Simply put, we, now, can be a suitable testimony of God's greatness. Christ indeed has the highest place in our lives. Not only in individuals, but especially when we are together.

This is what the apostle Paul was telling us.

The second session covers how Paul, when writing these things, always refers to the resurrection power of Jesus Christ. I think he knew how hard it is to be a testimony of Christ. Because God has this wonderful requirement for us to be holy and without blemish. On the other hand, he is telling us that God has given us the risen life of Christ. The risen life of Christ can overcome anything.

When we gather together, at home, at school, with kids, standing against the temptation of the world - the risen life of Christ can overcome all this. Not only Paul, but Peter also said this in 1 Peter.

These brothers not only love us and love the Lord, they are very very wise. They know that this is the way for you and I to become a testimony for the Lord - a real testimony. This is what we mentioned yesterday.

Fellowship is such an important thing. The verses we read show us how important this fellowship is to John and Paul. Not only to them individually, but when they see the church, the house of God that they love, they know that there must be this fellowship.

Fellowship is a word that is so hard to define. John uses 1 John 1 and 2 to define this. And the apostle Paul keeps coming back to this matter of fellowship in so many of his letters.

In the time that we have, I would like to give brothers and sisters a feel of what they are talking about.

The apostle John uses the first few verses of 1 John to talk about this. His emphasis is that the life of Christ has to be the center of this fellowship. Not only the center, but the content. Then, after we are engaged in this fellowship, I just want to mention 2 or 3 things that are a result of this fellowship.

They all have to do with the changing of our insides. For example, in 1 John 1:7-9, John is saying that God is light, and if we walk in the light as He is in the light, then we fellowship with each other, and "the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin".

Pay attention that this “cleanses” is in the present tense. John does not mean that your sins are all cleansed on the day you were saved, and only the sins you committed in the past are cleansed. He means today. The sin you committed today. All cleansed.

If you have any doubt about this, look at the next verse (v8). If you say you have no sin, then you make God out to be a liar. So he is basically saying “remember your sin today, and you ought to confess it”. I think that is his emphasis.

Thank the Lord that John says now we are in the fellowship of the life of Christ. We need to be very sensitive and not insist that we are not sinners. We ought to admit and confess our sins unto the Lord.

Just this morning, when my brother was saying something, I hated him. In this fellowship of the life of Christ, the Lord wants us to be really clean, really sensitive.

And the second thing following this, John is saying that we have an old command, and in the next sentence, that we have a new command. He never says what the old command and the new command is, but as you read on you realize that the command is to love one another. This is what the Lord told us to do.

John is saying that this command could be an old command to you or a new one. What’s the difference? It is found in a very key sentence. He is saying “to him this is true. And to you this is true”.

Again, a new commandment I write to you, which thing is true in Him and in you,
1 John 2:8

Dear brothers and sisters, when we see a command in the Bible, you can consider it as a piece of paper or a sentence just written on it. Just as in the time of Jesus, how the people looked upon the Ten Commandments. They were just words.

But John said, “the new command is true to the Lord and true to you”. That is no longer outside of you. It is now inside you. I no longer consider it as just words on paper. I consider it as what God has said to my heart, specifically to me. I have to pay attention to it. Now it has become a new command.

Brothers and sisters, when you read on in 1 John, we are different as a result of this fellowship in the life of Christ. The Bible is now something different to me. Not just something to memorize, but now something for me to really converse and communicate, so that that which is true to the Lord is true to me.

The third thing John said is not to love the world, but to love God. He said that the world and things in it. The things of the world are the lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, and the pride of life.

Brothers and sisters, is the world out there? Or is the world within us? These things of world - the lust of the eyes, lust of the flesh and pride of life. When you really get engaged in this fellowship of the life of Christ, where the original was with the Father and the Son, and now the people who have seen the Lord, heard the Lord and grasped hold of the Lord has brought us into this - when we stay in that fellowship under the light of God, as time goes on, we become very sensitive to our own transgressions. All these things written in the law are now written in our heart.

When I think of the temptation of the world, I do not think of the bank out there. There is nothing wrong with the bank, but something that is wrong with me. The lust of the eyes, the lust of the flesh, the pride of this life. This is what the apostle John is telling us.

Through this process, we end up abiding in Christ in a real way. The result of this is when the Lord comes, we will find something strange - we will find that we are like Him. This is the beginning of 1 John 3.

This is why the apostle John feels it is so important that we feel this fellowship. Next time when we think of fellowship, let us not think of only hanging out.

Now let us consider Paul.

Apostle Paul was Saul of Tarsus. He was the best student under the best teacher of the Jewish tradition. He must have been able to recite the whole Old Testament. He thought he knew everything, but gradually there became a problem. A person on the horizon, out of Nazareth was a person called Jesus. And people were going to Him. They were trying to find some fault with Him but could not. He must have been an imposter. So Saul hated the name of Jesus.

Then Jesus was crucified. And a while later, there was a young man called Stephen. He was a converted Jew, an original Greek. He went around Jerusalem saying that this Jesus made all the difference. Nobody could stop him.

So the Jewish council - all the elders - gathered together and grabbed Stephen. They asked him what he was talking about. Stephen told them that the Lord Jehovah has been good to us throughout all our history, starting from Abraham. That God in glory appeared to our father Abraham, and brought us into the Promised Land. Generation after generation.

Stephen then said that we the Jews have the law, and it is wonderful. The problem is that we cannot do the law. We are very proud of our temple. But when Solomon built the temple, God

said that the Most High God does not live in a house built by the hand of man. We are also very proud of our circumcision, but now our hearts and our ears are not circumcised. Then comes a righteous One. And we killed Him.

At this moment the council could no longer stand it. They dragged him out and stoned him. And there was this promising man called Saul who heard every word. It pricked his heart and he could never forget it. But he agreed and went with them to kill Stephen.

After that he went even more crazy, persecuting everyone who followed "the Way", which is Jesus. He got the paperwork to go from Jerusalem to Damascus to round up all these people to bring them back to be punished. Then a bright light came from heaven and struck him down. His eyes were blind.

"Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting me? It is hard for you to kick against the goads". And Saul said, "Lord, who are you?" Why did he call Him Lord? Because the voice and the light is from heaven.

And the voice says, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting". And Saul asked what he should do. The voice from heaven told him to go to the city and someone would talk to him. He could not eat for 3 days, and his eyes were blind. He must have been thinking what in the world was going on.

This Jesus whom I have persecuted. I hate Him because He is an imposter of the Jewish religion, but now He is the true Lord in heaven. I do not understand.

On the third day, a man whom he would have persecuted comes to Saul. The first thing he says to Saul is "Brother Saul, the One you met on the road - Christ Jesus - will raise you up. He has work for you". Saul could never imagine that one among these people whom he was persecuting would come and call him brother.

Thank the Lord that Saul changed. He changed from Saul to Paul.

So brothers and sisters, he never could forget these things. When we read the latter chapters of Acts, Paul was already around 60. He went to Jerusalem for the last time, and the Roman governor of Jerusalem wanted him to give a testimony. The high officials of the Jewish religion and the local king were there. They wanted to hear what happened to him.

There Paul mentions three particular persons. The first is Jesus of Nazareth. I persecuted the name of Jesus of Nazareth. The second person is Stephen, how I was there when they persecuted him. The third is the people who follow the Way whom I persecuted.

At the end of Paul's time, he could never forget these people. When he reflected on the past and saw the Head of the church - Christ Jesus, the Lord of Lords and King of Kings, but in particular the Head of the church. And he saw the body of Christ - Ananias, Stephen, all these people he persecuted. He could never forget.

This is the life of Christ he received as Saul.

When he wrote 1 Corinthians 13, how love bears all things, believes all things, hope all things, endures all things. What was he talking about? What was his experience? What caused him to be able to say something like that? It was these people whom he persecuted, now bearing him. No one could trust this Saul of Tarsus, but these people trusted him. I should say that they trusted that God would change Saul into Paul. These people could endure him.

Brothers and sisters, these things he could never forget. That is why I believe that later he wrote how he is least among the apostles (1 Corinthians 15). And a few years later when he wrote Ephesians 3, he said, "Among the saints, I am less than the least". And a few years later, when he wrote 1 Timothy, he said "among the sinners, I am the chief". Because I was the one who was persecuting God's people.

Years ago when I was reading these things I thought he was just writing something nice, words of ceremony. But deep down this is how he felt. He respected the other apostles. He respected all the saints saved before him. He felt that he had sinned against all these people that he had persecuted.

When he writes in 2 Timothy, just as he was about to die, how he had run the course, fought the fight and kept the faith, he also wrote that "I trust that there is a crown of righteousness reserved for me". And "Not only for me, but for all that love His appearing".

When he wrote Philippians 3, remember he said, "I am running towards the goal. Towards the reward God is going to give me". We may think that this is something only the apostle Paul is qualified to say. But he doesn't think so. He wrote, "for all those who are mature in the Lord. They all will run towards to the goal. They all can wait for the reward". Another thing in Philippians 2, he implied that he was going to die very soon, but he would be like a drink offering pour on the sacrifice of faith of the saints.

We may think Paul is such a great apostle, and we would be the small drink offering while he would be the large sacrifice, but Paul himself thinks the other way.

So we see this fellowship in the body of Christ is real to Paul. It is a real experience, a real belief.

I will give you another example. In Galatians 1:18, it says that the apostle Paul spent 3 years in the Arabian desert, after Damascus. He stayed with Peter for 15 days. He didn't see anybody

else, with the exception of James. Remember that Peter and Paul are not from the same school or the same background. At the beginning, Saul and Peter would have been enemies. But after 3 years in the desert, he stayed with Peter 15 days. The Bible didn't say what they spoke about. But it is not an easy thing to live together for 15 days.

Peter was with Jesus of Nazareth for 3 and a half years. He was close to the Lord, hearing every word He said. He saw all the things He did. He saw Jesus suffer, died and was raised. He experienced everything. All these things that Saul knew nothing about. Even 3 years later, Paul knew nothing of this. Paul knew that, but he wanted to know.

On the other hand, how Saul turned into Paul, this experience on the way to Damascus, this experience of persecuting Ananias and the others; this experience of being forgiven; how these 3 years Paul was trying to compare the Old Testament with the risen Lord; - these things Peter knew nothing about.

Think about how wonderful they were together for 15 days! You can't imagine how much love is there. Both of them loved the Lord. You can't imagine how much truth they exchanged. You can't imagine how much experience they exchanged. It is truly wonderful.

Remember one thing - the apostle Paul went to see Peter. This is why the apostle Paul thinks the fellowship is so important. He has fellowship with Stephen, although Stephen was stoned to death. He had fellowship with Ananias. He had fellowship with all these people he persecuted. He had fellowship with Peter. That is why he thinks fellowship is so important.

When he wrote his letters, the first thing he said is that when we gather together, this is the fellowship of the Son of God. Dear brothers and sisters, when we go to the church on Sunday, the first thing we are looking for is not for friends, but for the Lord. There may be things you want to say, but the first thing should be that we want to talk to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. You may have problems at home, and you may want to talk to somebody. Don't look for a brother or sister. Look first for Jesus Christ, the Son of God. Jesus Christ, the Lord of my house.

This is what the apostle Paul was saying - to enter in the fellowship of the Son of God.

Thank the Lord that we have a chance to gather here. This is the fellowship of the Son of God, Christ Jesus our Lord. First and foremost.

The next thing Paul writes about the Lord's table is that fellowship with His blood and His broken body. Dear brothers and sisters, it is incredible that every Sunday, when we come to the Lord's table, you cannot forget that He has bled, that His body has been broken. Because his blood is shed for me. His body is broken for me. We thank Him for that. Every time we come to the Lord's table we go away a different person. He shed His blood for my sin - that is for my past. But now there is something new for every day. The cup that we drink - the cup of His blood

- is the cup of covenant. What does that mean? It means that forever, He is responsible for you and for me.

Remember what brother Dana shared this morning? That He is forever responsible for you and for me. It is not that He should - but He said that when we gather together to have this cup and this bread, the cup is His covenant with us. So He has this covenant with us. You and I may forget, but He will never forget that He is forever responsible for you and me.

That is our confidence for our life today, next week, all the days of our lives. The Lord's Table is so significant for our lives. Not only for our past, but for today and tomorrow. The blood of the covenant for you and for me.

The Lord's table is also for you and me to love. It is like coming home. Recently, in the past few years, I have liked reading Psalm 84. There is the sparrow and the swallow. The sparrow finds her home at Your altar, and the swallow finds a nest for her young. And then the Psalmist says that we shall praise Him.

The altar is an awful place. The bull and the lamb were sacrificed there, but the sparrow found a wonderful place. He wants the altar of the Lord to be our home. The swallow loves the altar of the Lord so much that she wants her young to live there. Not only does she love the altar, but she wants her young to love the altar because she knows it is better than anything they will ever have.

The altar is the cross of the Lord. It is the table where our dear Lord shed His blood, where His body was broken. AND that is where my home is. That is where my children's home is. Nowhere else in the world would I rather be.

Brothers and sisters, this is where the apostle Paul says we will have fellowship with the Lord.

When it comes to the ministry of the saints, our Lord wants us to have in our hearts the ministry to the saints. It does not matter how much.

There were rich people offering a lot, and the widow who offered her 2 copper coins. The Lord was there and He loved the widow's 2 mites. It is not about how much you give, it is whether you have fellowship with Him.

Do you care for those people who are poor, or brothers and sisters who have need? I have always been thrilled by something David wrote.

In 1 Chronicles 29, David wanted to build the Lord a house, but the Lord told him that he would not be the one. So he went about something the Lord wouldn't stop him from doing. He

gathered all the materials and all the money. He stirred up everyone in the kingdom to make their offerings, and they all did very happily.

And David writes

But who am I, and who are my people,
That we should be able to offer so willingly as this?
1 Chronicles 29:14

And then he writes that we only gave what God has given them.

Many years later, when the apostle Paul wrote 2 Corinthians 8, talking about the matter of offering, there we find a sentence of fellowship in the ministering to the saints. In that chapter, Paul said the same thing. "Lord it is by your grace that we offer to you what you have given to us".

How wonderful this is! Brothers and sisters, think about the ones who have need. Even the brothers and sisters who do not meet with you. Think of them, pray for them, fellowship with them in offering.

The next thing the apostle Paul thinks is that the gospel is fellowship. There is a fellowship in prospering of the gospel, a unity in one heart and mind. When there is a gospel meeting we often pray for the speaker, but we don't often pray for ourselves.

There is a hymn "Make me a blessing". The song says make me a blessing, not just blessing the speaker. You may think that "I am not good at speaking, I am not the gospel speaking". But the song says "out of my life, let Jesus shine".

We may not have to speak the gospel message, but the Lord must shine from your lives and mine.

Many gospel friends come to the church, and the reason they stay is because they find that you are different. They may not be able to say why, but they find you different. One day when they know Christ, they will realize that Jesus is shining out of your life.

Bear that in mind: that the gospel is my business. I have to fellowship in the gospel. Out of my life may Jesus shine.

These are very practical things that Paul is talking about. And then he talks about fellowship in the suffering of Christ. Sometimes I hear brothers and sisters tell me their story - how they suffered in various circumstances. But in their suffering, Christ is in them. Christ is their strength. Christ is their light. Christ is their comfort. Christ is their purpose. I just bow my head and praise the Lord.

Dear brothers and sisters, the Lord suffered, and He wants us to suffer with Him. The pain He bore and brought us through this process, making us a different person. To suffer with Christ is not a passive thing - it is a very active thing. Something will come out of it. The apostle Paul, in his letter to the Galatians, said, "For your sake I would go through the labor of pain again, so that Christ may be formed in you".

Brothers and sisters, that is extremely encouraging to us. Don't say that "I am not qualified to go through labor for the Lord". Don't say that. One of these days you will find that you are suffering for the Lord, for the sake of brothers and sisters. If you walk with the Lord, you will. But the wonder is that Christ will be formed in you. Not only for the one who suffers, but the brothers and sisters, the church, the ones whom you suffer for, Christ is formed in them.

It is an extremely positive thing. Let us humble ourselves before the Lord. I ask the Lord "I can't bear this, it is very painful. But it is your suffering. I thank you for allowing me to fellowship with you in that. Give me the strength that I can go through this. That I may be a blessing to my brothers and sisters."

Dear brothers and sisters, that will happen. When you suffer with Christ, you will be a blessing to brothers and sisters. Thank God for that.

Lastly, the fellowship in mystery of God's purpose.

Dear brother and sisters, this time when we gather together, we all have a sense of how precious God's eternal purpose is. How precious God's testimony and the church's testimony is. The heavenly vision of Christ Jesus, that we should walk with Him, our eyes should be opened, this is precious. But these are not only things the speakers talk about. It is my business. This is my portion. I have fellowship in this.

Thank the Lord, brothers and sisters. If in the end you think that all this talk is beautiful, but it has nothing to do with me, we have failed miserably.

I believe that all these brothers, all of us together, our purpose is not just to hear good messages. We would rather that the vision of the Lord really get into each one of us. And that the Lord's testimony would get into the hearts of each one of us. And God's eternal purpose becomes our business.

Dear brothers and sisters, then you will be walking in heaven. Although you live an earthly life, you actually live in heaven with our Lord Jesus Christ. With all these wonderful saints in the past, and with each other. This is the fellowship. Thank the Lord.

Lord, we thank you for bringing us into this fellowship. Generation after generation, you have such incredible patience for your people. Lord, we thank you so much that over the past years you have brought us into this. We thank you for your apostles, our brother John, Peter and Paul. They themselves are beneficiaries of your fellowship. And also the fellowship of the body of Christ, of all brothers and sisters. Today, we are the beneficiaries of this fellowship. This is truly wonderful. We thank you, Lord. We pray that you give us strength, that we do not forget your heart and your mind for your people. Thank you Lord, in name of the Lord Jesus we pray, Amen