

# Fellowship

## A word study

To quote the talk show host, Matt Murphy, “words *mean* things.” Another talk show host, Gordon Liddy, once said that “precise words lead to precise thoughts.” Both men are emphasizing the importance of using words properly and carefully. This becomes especially important in religious discussions, as our souls’ salvation depends on us understanding God’s will. (Romans 10:17; Ephesians 3:3-5; etc.) And so the exhortation comes to us in biblical terms as follows: “If anyone speaks, let him speak as the oracles of God.” (1 Peter 4:11)

Sadly, though, people have changed the usage of many Bible words. For example, in the New Testament a “church” **never** refers to a physical structure! But that usage has become a common part of how people talk nowadays, and so the Bible concept of the church becomes increasingly difficult to communicate. Similarly, respect for God Almighty is lost as one of His sacred and ominous characteristics – “Holy and reverend is His name” *Psalm 111:9 (KJV)* – becomes applied to mere men, even as a religious title! (Note that the same point can be made from the New King James translation of that same word, “awesome.”)

With this in mind, the study turns to “**fellowship**” among Christians. The term “fellowship” in the New Testament comes from the Greek words, κοινωνία, <koinonia> and μετοχή <metoche>. <Metoche> appears only once (2 Corinthians 6:14) and is translated “fellowship.” Any given word in one language can almost always be translated in more than one way, and its related word <metochos> appears seven times and is translated “partaker” (5 times), “fellow,” and “partner.”

In the case of <koinonia>, which appears 20 times, it is usually translated “**fellowship**” in the New King James Version (e.g., 1 Corinthians 10:20, 2 Corinthians 6:14, Ephesians 5:11, Philippians 3:10, and verses in the section below), and also as “**contribution**” (Romans 15:26), “**communion**” (1 Corinthians 10:16; 2 Corinthians 13:14), and “**sharing/share**.” (2 Corinthians 9:13; Philemon 6; Hebrews 13:16) The King James Version, once each, uses “**communication**,” “**to communicate**,” and “**distribution**.” The related word, <koinonos>, is translated “**partaker**” (five times), “**partner**” (three times), and “**companion**” (once).

By reading the above passages (in their contexts, of course), we see that “**fellowship**” <koinonia> refers to either ...

1. a communion with God (1 Corinthians 1:9; Ephesians 3:9; Philippians 2:1; 3:10; 1 John 1:3, 6),
2. a spiritual communion with the saints (Acts 2:42; Galatians 2:9; 1 John 1:3, 7),
3. a joint participation or partnership with the saints in supporting the preaching of the gospel (Philippians 1:5; compare 4:10-18), or
4. a joint participation or partnership in ministering to needy saints (2 Corinthians 8:4; compare 2 Corinthians 9:12-13)

Does it surprise you to learn that people have changed the usage of “fellowship”? In the New Testament, “fellowship” **never** refers to a common association (such as is experienced while eating or playing together), and God hammers home the point that Christians have **no** “fellowship” with unbelievers. So the next time you hear about a “fellowship hall” or a “fellowship meal,” just flag those terms in your mind as further examples of Bible words whose meanings have been hijacked by indolent Bible students into a carnal and profane realm. (And, try to remember what the word **really** means!)