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**The Essence of Fellowship**

**David DeWitt**

In the Bible, a relationship has three basic elements: fellowship, friendship, and love.

**Fellowship** is mutual sharing. It’s all about reciprocation. Either it is giving, expecting a response, or responding to something given. The opposite of fellowship is stinginess, the unwillingness to share mutually.



**Love** (*agape* love) is very different. In one sense, it’s the opposite of, without being contradictory to, fellowship. Love is giving without an expectation of reciprocation. It has no expectation of a return for a gift. Although it may hope for good things to happen later, it is giving without any thought of return for the giving itself. Fellowship is two-way. Love is one-way. Both may or may not exist at the same time, but they are not the same thing. Fellowship and love are mutually exclusive (non-overlapping) aspects of a biblical relationship.

**Friendship,** on the other hand, can go two-way, one-way, or no-way at all. Friendship is an affection which may either expect a return, or not expect a return, or have a subjective return. In other words, a person can have an affection others aren’t even aware of. And that’s the major difference between biblical friendship and secular friendship. The secular definition of friendship is always two-way, “a relationship of mutual affection between two or more people” (Wikipedia). That “mutual” concept of friendship is also in the Bible. But the Bible recognizes a friendship that the world does not, or at least the world would use a different word for it. Biblical friendship can be with those who do not, or things that cannot, reciprocate, such as the world itself (James 4:4).

**As depicted in the circles diagram**:

**There is considerable overlap between fellowship and friendship**, since either of them may reciprocate. Friendship might be reciprocated and fellowship always is.

And **friendship overlaps with love** because both of them might give without expectation of return.

Friendship might give without expecting reciprocity, love always does.

But **there is no overlap whatsoever between fellowship and love**. Fellowship always expects a return, love never does.

**Defining Fellowship**

The Christian life has many values, even here on earth, this side of heaven (Mark 10:29-30). We have the eternal Word of God recorded in the Bible to give us truth in the midst of a world of lies. We have the indwelling Holy Spirit to convict us of sin and guide us to an application of God’s Word. We have a peace that passes understanding, an assurance of eternal hope, and a promise of salvation. As believers, we also find one another and establish a network of Christian fellowship, which allows us to support each other, encourage each other, give to each other, laugh together, and weep together.

From the very start of the church, *they were continually devoting themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to* ***fellowship****, to the breaking of bread and to prayer* (Acts 2:42). Fellowship is essential for a healthy spiritual life. Everyone needs others. That’s the way God made us. The noun form of *koinonia* combined with the prefix *sug* meaning *together,* is the Greek word *sugkoinonos*. This word occurs 4 times in the New Testament, translated *fellowship together* or *participate.* I suggest that, biblically speaking, **Fellowship Is an Entanglement of Human Lives, resulting in a Decision to Share Something Beneficial.** Or simply, **Fellowship Is Beneficial Sharing.**