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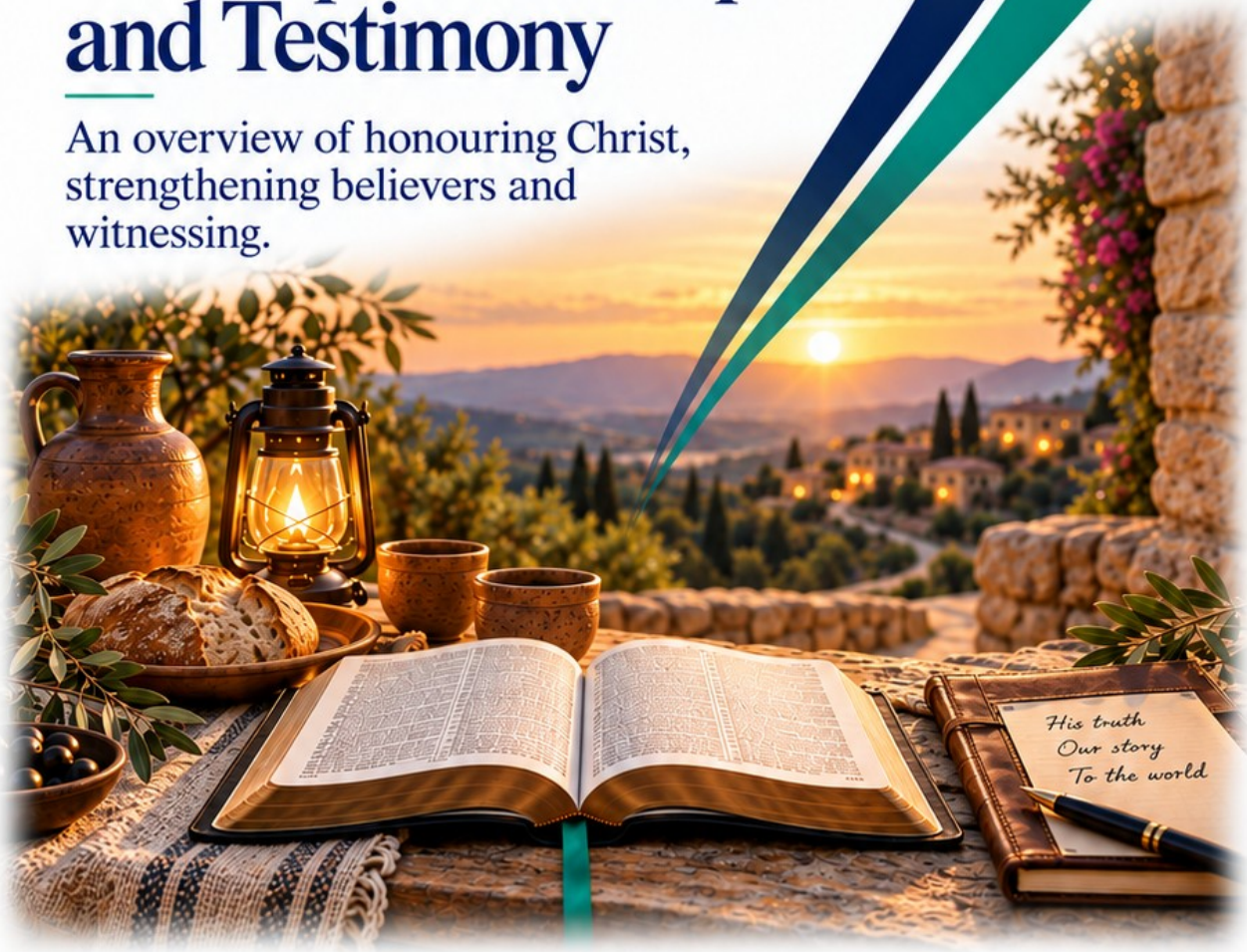
STUDY GUIDE 16

Foundations *of* Discipleship

STUDY GUIDE 5 OF 7:

Worship, Fellowship and Testimony

An overview of honouring Christ, strengthening believers and witnessing.



Equipping and empowering for effective service

2 Timothy 2:2

INSTRUCTIONS FOR THE STUDENT

My Study Plan

Preparing a Study Plan before starting this Study Guide will assist you in completing it within a designated timeframe. It also helps in developing the discipline required for studying God's Word effectively.

Proverbs 16:3:

Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established.

My Study Guide Journal

Keep a record as you progress through your Study Guide, including the Personal Responses for each section, for future reference and goal setting.

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Important Points

- COGMA does not claim to be infallible or the authority.
- Infallibility and authority belong only to God and His Word.

COGMA therefore strongly advises that you prayerfully study the content of each Study Guide with the heart of a Berean (**Acts 17:10–12**).

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PREFACE

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The Christian life is not intended to be lived in isolation. The born-again believer has been brought into a living relationship with Jesus Christ, and that new life is shared with others who belong to Him. Worship, fellowship and testimony are therefore not separate religious activities, but expressions of the life of Christ within the disciple.

In the previous Study Guide, we considered service, stewardship and giving. We saw that everything we have belongs to Jesus Christ and should be used faithfully for His purpose and for the good of others.

This Study Guide continues that practical development of discipleship. We will consider how we worship God, how we share spiritual fellowship with His people and how the life He has given us becomes a testimony to others.

Jesus said in **John 4:23-24**:

> *"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

True worship begins in the heart and is not confined to a particular building, meeting or outward form. The born-again believer worships God *"in spirit and in truth"* because true worship flows from spiritual life.

In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ dwells within His people by His Spirit. Fellowship is therefore much more than simply being in the same physical place because believers share the same spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

Our testimony is also more than the words we speak. It includes the life we live, the truth we hold and the witness of Jesus Christ seen through us.

As we study these subjects, the purpose is not simply to understand worship, fellowship and testimony as doctrines. The purpose is to live them, allowing each one to become a practical expression of the life of Christ within.

Worship should direct our hearts towards Jesus Christ, fellowship should strengthen His body, and testimony should make His truth visible to others. Together, these areas help the disciple continue growing and living faithfully in Him.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do worship, fellowship, and testimony belong together in a life shared with Christ?

Personal Reflection

In which of worship, fellowship or testimony do your daily choices least reflect Christ's life within? Why?

Action Step

Which of worship, fellowship or testimony has become detached from your everyday life? What does that reveal about your priorities, and how will you respond through Christ's life within?

INTRODUCTION: A LIFE SHARED WITH JESUS CHRIST

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The new birth brings the believer into more than a changed way of thinking or a new set of religious practices. It brings us into a living relationship with Jesus Christ. His life within us changes how we worship, how we relate to other believers and how we live before the world.

These three areas, worship, fellowship and testimony, belong together. Worship expresses our response to Jesus Christ, fellowship expresses the spiritual life we share with Him and with those who are born of God, and testimony expresses that life outwardly so that others can see and hear what Jesus Christ has done.

Worship Begins With Jesus Christ

True worship begins with recognising who God is and what He has done for us. It is not limited to singing, attending a meeting or taking part in a public service because worship begins in the heart and should affect the whole life.

Jesus said in **Matthew 4:10**:

> *"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Worship belongs to God alone. The disciple therefore learns to live with reverence, gratitude and submission to Jesus Christ, recognising that He alone is worthy of our worship.

Fellowship Is Shared Spiritual Life

Fellowship is also more than being physically present with other people. Biblical fellowship begins with our relationship with Jesus Christ and the spiritual life we have received in Him.

John wrote in **1 John 1:3**:

> *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."*

True fellowship is possible because believers share the same spiritual life in Christ. When Jesus Christ dwells within His people, they are joined together by something far deeper than friendship, nationality, age or background.

This spiritual fellowship should then be expressed practically. Believers gather together, encourage one another, pray together, share the Word and care for one another.

Testimony Makes the Life Visible

The life of Christ within should also become visible to others. Jesus told His disciples that they would be witnesses of Him.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

A witness speaks about what is known to be true. However, Christian testimony involves more than words because our conduct, choices, attitudes and relationships should agree with the truth we profess.

A disciple whose words speak of Jesus Christ while the life contradicts those words gives a confused testimony. What we say and how we live should agree.

Three Expressions of One Life

Worship, fellowship and testimony should therefore never be treated as unrelated subjects. Each one flows from the same new life received in Jesus Christ.

We worship because Jesus Christ is worthy, and we fellowship because His life joins His people together. We testify because the life we have received should be seen and shared with others.

These are not simply activities added to a Christian routine. They are expressions of the new life we already possess in Jesus Christ.

As we study each subject, one central question should remain before us: How should the life of Jesus Christ within me be expressed towards God, towards His people and towards those who do not yet know Him?

That question will guide us through this Study Guide. Worship, fellowship and testimony should each direct attention towards Jesus Christ and allow His life within the disciple to become increasingly visible.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does the life of Jesus Christ join worship, fellowship, and testimony?

Personal Reflection

Have you attended worship or fellowship while giving little attention to how you witness to Christ in daily life? What needs to change?

Action Step

Have you emphasised worship while neglecting others, or fellowship without speaking of Christ? What change of heart is needed, and how will you bring these together this week?

CREATED TO WORSHIP

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Worship is not simply one activity among many in the life of a disciple. It reaches to the very purpose for which humanity was created. God alone is worthy of our worship, and our lives should increasingly reflect that truth.

John recorded in **Revelation 4:11**:

> *"Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power: for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created."*

Everything exists because God created it. We did not give ourselves life, and we do not exist independently of Him. Our lives therefore find their proper purpose when they are directed towards the One who created us.

The verse says that all things were created *"for thy pleasure."* God's pleasure is found in people who willingly honour Him, trust Him and walk before Him in reverence.

David wrote in **Psalm 147:11**:

> *"The LORD taketh pleasure in them that fear him, in those that hope in his mercy."*

This shows the kind of life that pleases God. It is a life that fears Him and hopes in His mercy.

God Alone Is Worthy

True worship begins by recognising the worthiness of God. The word worship carries the thought of recognising worth, so when we worship God, we acknowledge that He deserves honour, reverence and devotion because of who He is.

Jesus said in **Matthew 4:10**:

> *"Then saith Jesus unto him, Get thee hence, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve."*

Jesus joined worship and service together. We are to *"worship the Lord thy God"* and *"him only shalt thou serve."*

The disciple cannot place Jesus Christ alongside other objects of devotion. Our highest allegiance belongs to Him because He alone is worthy.

Worship therefore involves far more than words spoken or songs sung. A person may sing about God while giving the deepest loyalty of the heart to possessions, success, reputation or self.

True worship gives Jesus Christ the highest place. What governs our heart and life must agree with the worship expressed through our words.

Worship Flows From Knowing God

The more clearly we understand who God is and what He has done, the more reason we have to worship Him. We worship because He is our Creator, but the born-again believer also worships because of the salvation and new life received through Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Romans 5:10**:

> *"For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life."*

The disciple therefore does not worship from empty religious duty. Worship should rise from a heart that remembers the mercy, salvation and life received through Jesus Christ.

The more we understand what He has done, the more deeply we recognise that He is worthy. Worship becomes a response to knowing Jesus Christ and recognising His goodness.

Worship Involves the Whole Person

Jesus taught that our relationship with God should involve the whole person. True worship cannot be separated from a life that loves Him completely.

Jesus said in **Mark 12:30**:

> *"And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength: this is the first commandment."*

Our heart, soul, mind and strength are all involved. Our whole life is involved in worship.

Worship may be expressed through prayer, singing, thanksgiving, testimony and praise. However, these outward expressions should flow from an inward recognition of who Jesus Christ is.

Without the heart, outward actions can become empty forms. True worship comes from within and is expressed through a life that loves and honours Jesus Christ.

Worship Can Be Shared With Others

Worship is personal, but it is also something God's people can share together. Believers can join together in recognising who God is and giving Him honour and praise.

David wrote in **Psalm 95:6-7**:

> *"O come, let us worship and bow down: let us kneel before the LORD our maker. For he is our God; and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand. To day if ye will hear his voice."*

Notice the invitation *"O come, let us worship."* God's people gathered together to acknowledge Him as their Maker and Shepherd.

The same principle remains important for the disciple. We worship personally, but we also join with other believers in giving honour and praise to Jesus Christ.

Whom Do We Worship?

Human beings continually give value, attention and devotion to something. The important question is what occupies the highest place in our lives.

Jesus Christ alone deserves that place. The disciple must therefore be willing to examine what receives the greatest devotion of the heart.

We should ask what matters most to us and what receives our greatest attention. We should also consider who truly governs our lives.

True worship begins when the answer is Jesus Christ. Our words, devotion and daily life should all recognise His rightful place.

We were created by God and for God. Our lives find their proper purpose when Jesus Christ is recognised, loved and worshipped as the One who alone is worthy.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why does the One we worship matter more than the form of our worship?

Personal Reflection

What has claimed attention that belongs to God?

Action Step

What has been competing with Jesus Christ for your greatest attention? What will you change in your priorities so that your next choice expresses wholehearted worship of Him?

TRUE WORSHIP IN SPIRIT AND IN TRUTH

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True worship cannot be measured simply by attendance at a meeting, participation in singing or involvement in religious activity. True worship begins in the heart and is directed towards God in spirit and in truth.

Jesus explained this clearly when speaking with the Samaritan woman. He said in **John 4:23-24**:

> *"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

Jesus spoke of *"true worshippers."* This shows that it is possible to practise outward forms of worship without possessing the heart of a true worshipper.

God is not looking simply for religious activity. He seeks people who worship Him in spirit and in truth.

Worship Begins in the Heart

Biblical worship includes reverence, honour, humility and submission before God. In the Old Testament, worship was often expressed physically through bowing down or falling before the LORD, but these outward actions expressed an inward attitude.

The same principle remains important today. A person may outwardly participate in worship while the heart remains distant from God, so true worship must begin within.

Jesus said in **Matthew 15:8-9**:

> *"This people draweth nigh unto me with their mouth, and honoureth me with their lips; but their heart is far from me. But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men."*

Their mouths spoke religious words, but their hearts were far from God. This teaches us that outward expression cannot replace inward reality.

The disciple should therefore never be satisfied simply because the outward form appears correct. True worship requires a heart that is genuinely turned towards Jesus Christ.

Worship in Spirit

Jesus said that God must be worshipped *"in spirit."* God is Spirit, and true worship therefore cannot depend upon a physical location, outward ceremony or religious atmosphere.

The born-again believer has received spiritual life through Jesus Christ. Worship now rises from that new life within rather than depending upon an outward form to produce spiritual reality.

This does not mean that outward expressions such as singing, prayer, thanksgiving or praise are unimportant. It means that these expressions must come from a heart that is spiritually alive unto God.

The outward action should express the inward reality. A song without the heart is only sound, while a prayer without sincerity is only words.

A testimony without truth is only speech. True worship comes from within, and the outward expression should agree with the spiritual life of the worshipper.

Worship in Truth

Jesus also said that true worship must be *"in truth."* Sincerity alone is not enough because a person may be sincere and still believe something that is not true.

Jesus said in **John 17:17**:

> *"Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth."*

Truth is established by God's Word. Our worship must therefore agree with the truth God has revealed.

We cannot worship God according only to personal preference, tradition or emotional experience while ignoring His Word. The disciple must continually allow Scripture to shape our understanding of who God is, what He has done and how we should respond to Him.

True worship joins a sincere heart with the truth of God's Word. Spirit and truth therefore belong together in the worship Jesus described.

Worship Flows From Gratitude

As we understand the love, mercy and salvation of God, worship should become a natural response. Remembering what Jesus Christ has done turns the heart towards thanksgiving and praise.

David wrote in **Psalm 103:1-2**:

> *"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:"*

Notice the expression *"all that is within me."* David was not describing a cold religious duty because his worship came from remembering the goodness of God.

The disciple should likewise remember what Jesus Christ has done. He has saved us and forgiven us, and He has given us new life.

He has also come to dwell within the born-again believer by His Spirit. Remembering His goodness should therefore move the heart towards thanksgiving, praise and devotion.

Worship Must Involve the Whole Life

True worship cannot be confined to one hour of the week. If worship comes from the heart, it will influence the way the disciple lives throughout the week.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:1**:

> *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

The whole life is presented to God. Our words, conduct, choices and service should therefore honour Him.

The disciple does not simply participate in worship at certain times. The disciple becomes a worshipper, and worship becomes part of a life continually directed towards Jesus Christ.

True worship is the response of a heart that recognises the worthiness of Jesus Christ, walks in His truth and willingly gives the whole life to Him. The outward expressions of worship then flow naturally from that inward reality.

God seeks true worshippers, those who worship Him in spirit and in truth. The disciple therefore worships from the spiritual life within and according to the truth God has revealed in His Word.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What makes worship true in spirit and in truth?

Personal Reflection

Where does your outward worship hide an unwilling heart?

Action Step

Consider whether your outward worship agrees with your attitude and conduct. What must change, and how will you respond to the truth rather than rely on the appearance of worship?

WORSHIP IN THE NEW COVENANT

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Under the Old Covenant, worship was closely connected with physical places. The tabernacle and later the Temple became central to Israel's worship, and Jerusalem held a special place in the nation's religious life.

When Jesus spoke with the Samaritan woman, she raised the question of where people ought to worship. Jesus answered in **John 4:21**:

> *"Jesus saith unto her, Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father."*

Jesus was pointing towards a major change. Worship under the New Covenant would no longer be centred upon a particular mountain, city, Temple or physical location.

The Place of Worship Was Changing

Jesus continued in **John 4:23-24**:

> *"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is a Spirit: and they that worship him must worship him in spirit and in truth."*

The emphasis had moved from where people worshipped to how they worshipped. True worship would be *"in spirit and in truth."*

The disciple therefore does not need to travel to a particular location in order to find God. Nor is the presence of God confined to a church building, sanctuary or meeting place.

The Believer Is the Temple of God

One of the great realities of the New Covenant is that God now dwells within His people. The dwelling place of His Spirit is no longer understood as a physical Temple.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 3:16**:

> *"Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?"*

The born-again believer is not travelling towards a physical temple in order to approach God. The Spirit of God dwells within.

Jesus had promised His disciples in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

Jesus fulfilled this promise by coming to dwell within His people as the Holy Spirit. The believer therefore worships from the reality of Christ within, not by travelling to a place where God is believed to be specially located.

A Church Building Is Not the Temple

A building where believers gather can be useful. It may provide a place for teaching, prayer, singing, fellowship and other activities of the Church.

However, the building itself is not the Church, and it is not the Temple of God. The Church is made up of born-again people in whom Jesus Christ dwells.

This distinction is important because religious thinking can easily attach holiness to a physical location. People may begin to believe that God is more present in one building, city or gathering than somewhere else.

Jesus taught differently. The New Covenant directs us away from dependence upon sacred places and towards the spiritual reality of God dwelling within His people.

Worship Can Take Place Anywhere

Because worship is no longer centred upon a physical Temple, the disciple can worship Jesus Christ anywhere. Worship is not dependent upon entering a particular building or travelling to a particular place.

We may worship:

- In personal prayer;
- In the home with family;
- While reading and meditating upon the Word;
- While singing praise to God;
- While giving thanks throughout the day;
- When gathered publicly with other believers.

Public gatherings remain important, but they are not the only place where worship takes place. The believer does not enter the presence of God only when entering a meeting because Jesus Christ already dwells within the born-again believer.

Gathering Together Still Matters

The fact that worship is not confined to a building does not make gathering together unnecessary. God's people should still assemble to worship, pray, hear the Word and strengthen one another.

When believers gather, they do so as people who already possess the life of Christ within. The meeting place does not create the presence of God because His Spirit already dwells within His people.

This changes the way we think about public worship. We are not travelling to a special place in order to find God, but gathering with other believers who are themselves the dwelling place of His Spirit.

Gathering together therefore remains important because believers share worship and fellowship and strengthen one another. The importance belongs to the spiritual life shared by God's people rather than to the physical location in which they meet.

From Shadow to Spiritual Reality

The New Covenant has brought worship into its spiritual reality. The physical places and forms connected with the former covenant pointed towards something greater.

The focus is no longer a physical Temple or a sacred city. The focus is Jesus Christ dwelling within His people.

True worship therefore flows from the life of Christ within and is expressed wherever the disciple honours Him in spirit and in truth. The place may change, but the spiritual reality remains because Jesus Christ dwells within the believer.

In the New Covenant, we do not go to a place to meet God. Jesus Christ has come to dwell within His people. True worship now flows from that indwelling life wherever His people honour Him in spirit and in truth.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How does New Covenant worship flow from Christ and His work?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated worship as a ritual that can replace obedience?

Action Step

Have you relied upon attendance or a worship practice as though it could create spiritual life? How will you correct that understanding and honour Jesus Christ from His life already within?

WORSHIP AS A LIFE, NOT A PERFORMANCE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Worship is not a performance to be watched. It is a response of the heart towards Jesus Christ, and no one else can worship God on our behalf.

The disciple may gather with others, listen to preaching, hear songs, join in prayer or hear another person testify. These things can encourage worship, but they cannot replace our own response to God.

David wrote in **Psalm 103:1-2**:

> *"Bless the LORD, O my soul: and all that is within me, bless his holy name. Bless the LORD, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:"*

David called upon his own soul to bless the LORD. He remembered the goodness of God and responded personally because true worship must come from within.

Worship Requires Participation

Worship should never become something God's people simply observe. A congregation can easily become a place where a small number of people lead while everyone else watches, but worship should involve the people of God responding together to Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 14:26**:

> *"How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying."*

The emphasis is upon participation and edification. When believers gather, worship should not become entertainment or an opportunity to admire singers, musicians, speakers or personalities.

The attention belongs to Jesus Christ. Whatever takes place should help God's people honour Him and strengthen one another.

Worship Is More Than Singing

Singing is one expression of worship, but worship includes much more. The disciple worships whenever the heart and life are sincerely directed towards Jesus Christ.

Worship may be expressed through:

- Prayer;

- Praise;
- Thanksgiving;
- Testimony;
- Hearing and receiving the Word;
- Obedience;
- Service;
- A life that honours Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 3:17**:

> *"And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him."*

This shows that worship reaches into the whole life. What we do in word and deed should honour Jesus Christ rather than limiting worship to one particular activity.

The Heart Must Remain Centred Upon Christ

Worship can lose its purpose when attention shifts towards people, style or presentation. Something may be well presented and still fail to keep Jesus Christ at the centre.

Music may be beautiful, a message may be powerful and a testimony may be encouraging. These things can help direct our attention towards God, but none of them should become the object of worship.

Jesus Christ must remain central. The purpose is not to draw attention towards the person singing, speaking or leading, but towards the One who alone is worthy.

The disciple should therefore not ask only, *"Did I enjoy the service?"* A greater question is, *"Did I honour Jesus Christ?"*

This changes the way we approach a gathering. We come prepared not simply to receive something, but to give praise, thanksgiving and attention to Jesus Christ.

Worship Continues Beyond the Gathering

True worship does not begin when a meeting starts and end when it finishes. If worship is a response of the heart, it should continue throughout daily life.

The disciple can worship while praying alone, reading the Word or giving thanks. We can also honour Jesus Christ while serving another person and carrying out ordinary responsibilities faithfully.

Paul wrote in **Romans 12:1**:

> *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

The whole life is presented to God. Worship therefore cannot be reduced to a programme, meeting or performance because the whole life belongs to Jesus Christ.

Worship is a life lived in recognition that Jesus Christ is worthy. What takes place when believers gather should be an expression of the same worship that continues throughout the rest of life.

When believers gather, we should participate rather than simply observe. When the gathering ends, worship should continue through the way we speak, serve, obey and live.

The true worshipper does not simply attend worship. The true worshipper lives to honour Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why must worship continue beyond a service or performance?

Personal Reflection

When does your conduct contradict what you sing or say?

Action Step

Where do your words of praise and your daily conduct fail to agree? What specific attitude or habit will you change so that worship continues beyond a meeting?

WHAT IS BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP?

BACK TO CONTENTS

The word fellowship is often used to describe a meeting, a meal, a church activity or a group of people spending time together. These things may accompany fellowship, but biblical fellowship is much deeper. True fellowship begins with a shared spiritual life in Jesus Christ.

Jesus said in **Matthew 18:20**:

> *"For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."*

Biblical fellowship is therefore not simply people being in the same room. It is believers gathering together in the name of Jesus Christ and sharing the life they possess in Him.

Fellowship in the Early Church

After the Day of Pentecost, the new believers immediately gave themselves to fellowship. It became part of their continuing spiritual life together.

Luke wrote in **Acts 2:42**:

> *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

Notice the words *"continued stedfastly."* Fellowship was not treated as an occasional extra, but became part of the regular spiritual life of the believers.

Acts records their continuing life together in the apostles' doctrine, fellowship, breaking of bread and prayers. The reference to *"breaking of bread"* records part of their historical practice, but it should not be used to establish a continuing literal Lord's Supper ordinance for the Church. New Covenant communion is spiritual fellowship in Jesus Christ.

Their fellowship was therefore connected with truth, prayer and their shared life in Jesus Christ.

Fellowship Begins With Christ

The deepest basis of Christian fellowship is not personality, culture, nationality or common interests. It begins with the spiritual relationship believers share in Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 1:3**:

> *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."*

John first establishes fellowship with God and then fellowship with other believers. This order is important because our fellowship with one another flows from our fellowship with Jesus Christ.

Two people may enjoy each other's company and still not possess biblical fellowship. True spiritual fellowship exists because born-again believers share the same life in Jesus Christ.

Fellowship Is Spiritual

Jesus Christ promised His disciples that He would come to them. He said in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

At Pentecost, Jesus came to dwell within His people as the Holy Spirit. From that point, their fellowship with Him was no longer based upon physically walking beside Him because Christ now lived within them.

This spiritual life also joined believers together. Their fellowship was deeper than simply sharing the same physical location.

Paul could therefore write in **Colossians 2:5**:

> *"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."*

Paul was physically absent, yet he described a spiritual bond with those believers. This helps us understand that fellowship is deeper than physical presence.

Fellowship Requires Walking in the Light

John also gives an important condition for true fellowship. Spiritual fellowship cannot be separated from walking according to the truth of God.

John wrote in **1 John 1:6-7**:

> *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

A claim of fellowship is not enough. True fellowship is connected with walking in the light.

If a person claims to have fellowship with God while deliberately walking contrary to His truth, John says that claim is false. Biblical fellowship therefore involves both spiritual life and truth.

Fellowship Is More Than Attendance

A person may attend a congregation regularly and still remain spiritually disconnected. Physical attendance is important, but attendance itself does not create spiritual fellowship.

A gathering may include people who are born again, people who are still seeking God and people who hold different beliefs. Simply being together physically does not mean that everyone shares the same spiritual fellowship.

True fellowship exists where there is a common life in Jesus Christ and a willingness to walk in His light. The physical gathering provides an opportunity for that fellowship to be expressed, but it does not produce the spiritual life upon which fellowship rests.

Fellowship Should Be Expressed Practically

Although fellowship is spiritual in its source, it should become visible in the way believers treat one another. The shared life of Christ should produce practical care, encouragement and spiritual support.

Believers gather together, pray together and share the Word. We encourage one another, care for one another, rejoice together and help one another through difficulties.

Biblical fellowship is therefore both spiritual in its source and practical in its expression. The life believers share in Jesus Christ becomes visible through the way they strengthen and care for one another.

True fellowship is the shared life of born-again believers who are united in Jesus Christ, walking in His light and strengthening one another in the faith.

Personal Response

Key Truth

What makes fellowship a shared life in Christ rather than mere attendance?

Personal Reflection

Whom do you greet without truly caring for them?

Action Step

Think of a believer you greet but seldom consider personally. What has limited your care, and how will you express the fellowship you share in Christ through genuine encouragement?

FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD AND ONE ANOTHER

BACK TO CONTENTS

Biblical fellowship has two closely connected dimensions. We have fellowship with God, and because we share His life, we also have fellowship with one another. The second flows from the first.

John wrote in **1 John 1:3**:

> *"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ."*

John did not describe fellowship as simply friendship or regular attendance at meetings. He connected fellowship directly with Jesus Christ because the believer's relationship with other Christians rests upon the spiritual life they share in Him.

Fellowship With God

True fellowship with God is possible because the born-again believer has received spiritual life. Jesus Christ has come to dwell within His people by His Spirit.

Jesus promised His disciples in **John 14:18**:

> *"I will not leave you comfortless: I will come to you."*

At Pentecost, Jesus fulfilled that promise by coming to dwell within His people as the Holy Spirit. This changes the whole nature of fellowship with God.

The believer is not trying to reach a distant God because Jesus Christ has come to dwell within. Fellowship with Him is therefore a present spiritual reality.

Paul wrote in **Romans 8:9**:

> *"But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his."*

The Spirit of God is the Spirit of Christ. The born-again believer has received His Spirit, and fellowship with God therefore flows from the life of Christ within.

Fellowship Requires Walking in the Light

John also makes clear that fellowship cannot be separated from the way we live. A claim of fellowship with God must agree with a life that desires to walk according to His truth.

John wrote in **1 John 1:6-7**:

> *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

John connects fellowship with walking in the light. It is possible to claim fellowship with God while living contrary to His truth, but John says such a claim is false.

True fellowship therefore involves spiritual life and a continuing desire to walk according to the light God has given. The life within and the walk without should agree.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How are fellowship with God and fellowship with one another connected?

Personal Reflection

Is a strained relationship weakening your fellowship?

Action Step

Is there a strained relationship that you have allowed to remain unresolved? What attitude can you change, and what honest, appropriate step towards peace or care will you take?

Fellowship With One Another

When believers walk in the light, John says that *"we have fellowship one with another."* This fellowship is deeper than natural friendship because it comes from the spiritual life believers share in Jesus Christ.

Believers may come from different countries, cultures, ages and backgrounds, yet they share one spiritual life. Natural differences do not remove the spiritual unity found in Christ.

Paul expressed this unity in **Ephesians 4:4**:

> *"There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

There is one body because there is one Spirit. The same Spirit of Christ dwells within every born-again believer, and this is the foundation of true Christian fellowship.

Fellowship Is Not Limited by Distance

Physical presence is valuable, but spiritual fellowship is not completely dependent upon being in the same place. The life believers share in Jesus Christ is spiritual.

Paul described the shared spiritual position of believers in **Ephesians 2:6**:

> *"And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"*

The important words are *"in Christ Jesus."* Paul is not describing believers as physically sitting together in Heaven. He is describing the spiritual position they share in Christ. This helps us understand why true fellowship reaches beyond physical location.

Paul also wrote in **Colossians 2:5**:

> *"For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ."*

Paul was physically absent, yet he still spoke of a spiritual connection with those believers. Fellowship is therefore first spiritual and is then expressed physically when believers gather together.

Distance may prevent believers from being in the same room, but it cannot remove the spiritual bond they share in Christ. Physical gathering expresses fellowship, but Jesus Christ is the source of that fellowship.

Fellowship Should Produce Care

Spiritual fellowship should become visible in practical concern for other believers. If we truly belong to one body, the needs and experiences of other members should matter to us.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:25-27**:

> *"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*

True fellowship produces care. When one member suffers, others should care, and when one member rejoices, others should rejoice.

When someone is discouraged, fellowship should bring encouragement. When someone is weak, fellowship should bring support.

The body of Christ is not made up of isolated individuals. The members care for one another because they belong to Jesus Christ and share His life.

Fellowship Must Remain Centred in Christ

Christian fellowship becomes unhealthy when it becomes centred upon personalities, social groups or human loyalties. The common bond must always remain Jesus Christ.

We do not gather simply because we enjoy each other's company. Natural friendship may be part of fellowship, but we gather because we share His life.

This is why fellowship can remain strong even when believers differ in personality, background or natural preference. Our unity does not depend upon everyone being naturally alike.

The centre is not us because the centre is Jesus Christ. Fellowship remains healthy when He continues to hold the central place among His people.

True fellowship begins with Christ dwelling within, continues as we walk in the light, and is expressed through spiritual unity, care and love for one another.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can shared life with God change your treatment of another believer?

Personal Reflection

Where have you kept fellowship superficial or selective?

Action Step

Have natural preferences caused you to overlook a fellow believer? What does the unity of Christ's body require of your heart, and how will you show practical concern?

GATHERING TOGETHER TO EDIFY ONE ANOTHER

BACK TO CONTENTS

Biblical fellowship is spiritual, but it should also be expressed through believers gathering together. The New Testament does not present the Christian life as something to be lived in isolation. Believers need one another for encouragement, instruction, prayer and spiritual strengthening.

The writer of Hebrews wrote in **Hebrews 10:24-25**:

> *"And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching."*

Notice the purpose of gathering. We are to *"consider one another"* and *"exhort one another."*

The gathering is therefore not only about what we receive. It is also about what we can contribute to the spiritual welfare of others.

The Early Believers Continued Steadfastly

After Pentecost, the newly born-again believers quickly established a pattern of gathering and spiritual fellowship. Their shared life in Jesus Christ was expressed through continuing together in truth, fellowship and prayer.

Luke wrote in **Acts 2:42**:

> *"And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers."*

They *"continued stedfastly."* Their fellowship was not casual or occasional, but became part of their continuing spiritual life.

The enduring principle is that believers continue together in truth, fellowship and prayer, strengthening one another in Jesus Christ. The recorded breaking of bread does not establish literal bread as a continuing Gospel ordinance.

The disciple today also needs regular fellowship with other believers. We need the Word, prayer, encouragement and opportunities to strengthen one another.

Fellowship Is Active, Not Passive

Paul gives us an important picture of what should happen when believers gather. Fellowship should involve the body being strengthened rather than people simply being present.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 14:26**:

> *"How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying."*

The important principle is *"Let all things be done unto edifying."* To edify means to build up or strengthen.

The purpose of fellowship is therefore not entertainment. It should not become a performance by a small number of people while everyone else remains a spectator.

Believers gather so that the body may be strengthened. Whatever takes place should contribute towards that purpose.

Every Member Can Contribute

Not every believer will contribute in the same way, but every member can help strengthen others. The value of a contribution is not determined by how visible or impressive it appears.

Some may pray, testify or share something from the Word. Others may sing, encourage someone privately or provide practical help where there is a need.

The important question is whether what we contribute edifies. A few sincere words of encouragement may strengthen someone greatly, while a simple testimony of God's faithfulness may help another believer continue through difficulty.

A prayer may bring comfort and courage to someone carrying a burden. Every member should therefore come with a heart prepared both to receive and to give.

The Right Attitude in Fellowship

Gathering together does not automatically produce healthy fellowship. Our attitude towards one another matters because fellowship should be concerned with the spiritual good of others.

Paul wrote in **Romans 15:2**:

> *"Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification."*

The disciple should not attend fellowship looking for faults, disagreements or reasons to criticise. We should come with a desire to strengthen and encourage our brothers and sisters.

A useful question is, *"How can I strengthen someone today?"* This changes the way we approach fellowship.

Instead of thinking only about whether we enjoyed the meeting or received what we wanted, we begin considering whether someone else was encouraged, helped or strengthened. Fellowship becomes less centred upon ourselves and more concerned with the body.

Gathering Should Centre Upon Jesus Christ

Fellowship becomes unhealthy when attention is centred upon personalities, performances or human recognition. Jesus Christ must remain the centre.

The Word should direct us towards Him, and prayer should keep us dependent upon Him. Testimony should glorify Him, singing should honour Him, and encouragement should strengthen others in Him.

When believers gather with this purpose, fellowship becomes more than attendance. It becomes the body of Christ actively caring for and strengthening its members.

The gathering place itself does not create spiritual fellowship. Fellowship comes from the shared life believers already possess in Jesus Christ and is expressed as they gather to strengthen one another.

We gather not simply to be present, but to edify one another, grow together and strengthen the body of Christ in Jesus Christ. Each believer can contribute to that purpose as the life of Christ works through His people.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should a gathering build up the body of Christ?

Personal Reflection

Do you arrive expecting only to receive?

Action Step

When you gather with believers, do you mainly expect to receive? What will change in your approach, and how will you prepare to strengthen someone else?

MAINTAINING FELLOWSHIP AND UNITY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Gathering together is important, but fellowship must also be maintained. True fellowship requires humility, love, truth and a willingness to preserve the unity of the body of Christ.

Paul wrote in **Ephesians 4:1-4**:

> *"I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called, With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;"*

Paul connects unity with the way believers treat one another. He speaks of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, forbearing one another in love and keeping the unity of the Spirit.

Unity therefore involves more than simply attending the same congregation. It must be expressed through the way believers live and treat one another.

The Unity of the Spirit

Paul tells believers to be *"Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace."* Notice that the unity already exists in the Spirit because there is *"one body, and one Spirit."*

Born-again believers are joined together because the same Spirit of Christ dwells within them. Our responsibility is to keep that unity.

This requires humility and patience. We must learn to forgive offences and resist the desire to insist upon our own way.

Unity does not mean that truth becomes unimportant. Biblical unity is unity in Christ and in truth.

Fellowship Requires Walking in the Light

John warns that fellowship with God cannot be separated from the way we live. True fellowship must agree with the truth we profess.

John wrote in **1 John 1:6-7**:

> *"If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

A person may claim fellowship while choosing to walk contrary to God's truth. John says that such a claim is false.

True fellowship is maintained as believers continue walking in the light. Fellowship is therefore not preserved by ignoring sin or pretending that truth does not matter.

Neither is fellowship preserved by becoming harsh or argumentative. The disciple must walk in truth and love.

Care for the Members of the Body

Paul compared the Church to a physical body. The members belong together and should therefore care for one another.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 12:25-27**:

> *"That there should be no schism in the body; but that the members should have the same care one for another. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular."*

The words *"the same care one for another"* are important. Unity becomes practical when members genuinely care for each other.

If someone is suffering, fellowship should bring support, and if someone is discouraged, fellowship should bring encouragement. When someone rejoices, others should rejoice with them.

The body becomes stronger when the members stop thinking only about themselves and begin caring for one another. Spiritual unity should therefore become visible through practical love.

Guard Against Division

Paul said *"that there should be no schism in the body."* Division can begin through pride, selfishness, unresolved offences, gossip, personal loyalties or an unwillingness to forgive.

The disciple must therefore guard the heart. Problems that are allowed to remain unresolved can eventually damage fellowship between believers.

Not every disagreement needs to become a division. Believers may have different personalities and backgrounds while still treating one another with humility and love.

Our fellowship is not based upon everyone being naturally alike. Our fellowship is based upon Jesus Christ.

Maintain Your Spiritual Life

Maintaining fellowship with others also requires maintaining our own relationship with Jesus Christ. Spiritually healthy believers are better prepared to strengthen and encourage the body.

The disciple should continue to:

- Read and study the Word;
- Pray faithfully;
- Walk in the light already received;
- Gather with God's people;
- Serve others;
- Remain centred upon Jesus Christ.

These things help keep the disciple spiritually established. Healthy fellowship is strengthened when believers remain close to Jesus Christ and continue walking faithfully with Him.

One Body in Christ

The purpose of fellowship is not to build human loyalties around personalities. There is one body and one Spirit, and Jesus Christ is the life of that body.

The disciple therefore seeks to preserve fellowship through humility, truth, love and care for others. Our unity rests upon the spiritual life we share in Jesus Christ rather than upon natural similarities.

Maintaining fellowship means continuing to walk in the light, caring for the members of Christ's body and endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. As Jesus Christ remains the centre, His people can continue together in truth, love and spiritual unity.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why do humility and truth matter when maintaining unity?

Personal Reflection

Where have you allowed pride or avoidance to damage fellowship?

Action Step

Has pride, avoidance or a personal loyalty affected your fellowship? What needs correcting in you, and how will you speak truth with humility while seeking peace?

THE POWER OF YOUR TESTIMONY

BACK TO CONTENTS

A testimony is a declaration of what we know to be true. In the Bible, the idea of testimony carries the meaning of witness, evidence and bearing record. The disciple therefore has a responsibility not only to believe the truth, but also to bear witness to what Jesus Christ has done.

John wrote in **Revelation 12:11**:

> *"And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony; and they loved not their lives unto the death."*

Their testimony was not something unimportant or secondary. It formed part of their witness in the face of opposition, and a strong testimony should therefore become part of the life of every disciple.

Your Testimony Begins With Jesus Christ

A Christian testimony should never become a story centred upon self. The purpose is not to make ourselves appear impressive, spiritual or important because Jesus Christ must remain the centre of our testimony.

We testify to what He has done and to the truth He has revealed. We testify to the life He has given and to His continuing faithfulness.

A personal testimony may include the circumstances surrounding our salvation, answers to prayer, lessons learned through Scripture or ways God has helped us through difficulty. However, the purpose should always be to direct attention towards Jesus Christ.

A Testimony Is a Witness

A witness speaks about something that is known to be true. Biblical testimony therefore involves bearing record of the truth we have received and know.

John described his own witness in **Revelation 1:2**:

> *"Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."*

The expression *"bare record"* carries the idea of giving testimony. John was bearing witness to what God had revealed.

The disciple should have the same desire. What we know to be true from God's Word should become something we are willing to confess, live and share with others.

Your Life Is Part of Your Testimony

A testimony is more than words because what we say should agree with the way we live. The life of the disciple should support the truth being spoken.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**:

> *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."*

Paul described believers as an *"epistle of Christ."* People read our lives through the attitudes, choices and conduct they observe.

They also see how we respond when difficulties come. A testimony spoken with the mouth becomes much stronger when the life supports what is being said.

The disciple should therefore desire that words and conduct agree. What we say about Jesus Christ should be supported by the life we live.

Own What You Believe

A strong testimony requires personal conviction. It is not enough simply to repeat what a pastor, teacher or another believer has said.

The disciple should study the Word, understand the truth and become personally established in what Scripture teaches. We should be able to explain what we believe because we have seen and understood it in the Word of God.

This does not mean that we become proud or argumentative. It means that the truth has become our own personal conviction rather than something we repeat only because someone else taught it to us.

A borrowed belief produces a weak testimony because it has not become established personally. A truth understood, received and lived produces a stronger witness.

Testimony Should Encourage Others

Personal testimony can also strengthen other believers. When we speak truthfully about the faithfulness of Jesus Christ, others may be encouraged to continue trusting Him.

When we speak about how the Word has helped us, another believer may be encouraged to study more faithfully. When we share how Jesus Christ has changed our life, others may be reminded of His power to save and make a person new.

Our testimony should therefore be truthful, humble and centred upon Jesus Christ. We should not exaggerate experiences or use testimony as a way of drawing attention towards ourselves.

The purpose of testimony is to bear witness to Jesus Christ. The disciple should therefore seek to develop a testimony that is not only spoken, but also lived.

A powerful testimony is the truth of Jesus Christ believed in the heart, confessed with the mouth and demonstrated through the life.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can a personal testimony point to Jesus Christ rather than the speaker?

Personal Reflection

Have you stayed silent about His work or made yourself the focus?

Action Step

Consider whether your testimony has focused more on your own experiences than Jesus Christ. What will you change, and how will you tell someone truthfully what He has done?

GOD'S TESTIMONY IS GREATER THAN PERSONAL EXPERIENCE

BACK TO CONTENTS

Personal testimony is important, but it must never be placed above the testimony of God. Our experiences must be judged by the Word of God; the Word of God must never be judged by our experiences.

A person may sincerely describe something they have felt, seen or experienced. However, sincerity does not make an experience the standard of truth.

Peter wrote in **2 Peter 1:19**:

> *"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts:"*

Peter speaks of *"a more sure word."* God's Word is dependable and gives the disciple a standard by which every teaching, testimony and spiritual claim should be examined.

David also described the testimony of the LORD as sure. He wrote in **Psalm 19:7**:

> *"The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul: the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple."*

God's testimony is sure because it comes from Him. His written Word reveals His truth and provides the standard by which our personal testimony and experiences must be judged.

Experience Must Agree With Scripture

Experiences can be powerful and may leave a lasting impression upon us. Yet an experience does not have spiritual authority simply because it felt real or appeared spiritual.

The disciple must ask, *"Does this agree with the Word of God?"* If an experience contradicts Scripture, that experience cannot be used to overturn what God has already revealed.

This principle protects the believer from confusion. We do not begin with what we have felt and then try to make Scripture agree with it.

We begin with the Word of God and bring our experiences under its authority. Scripture remains the standard by which the meaning of an experience must be understood.

Jesus Christ Is Complete

One area where this becomes especially important concerns teachings that place spiritual experiences after salvation as though receiving Jesus Christ were not enough. Some teach that a person may be saved through Jesus Christ and must later receive the Holy Spirit as a separate experience in order to become spiritually complete.

Paul wrote in **Colossians 2:10**:

> *"And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power:"*

The words are plain: *"ye are complete in him."* The born-again believer is complete in Jesus Christ.

At the new birth, the believer receives Jesus Christ and the Spirit of Christ dwells within. We must therefore be careful about any testimony that suggests Christ has saved a person but left them spiritually incomplete until another necessary spiritual experience is received.

Our confidence must remain in what God has said. Complete means complete.

Personal Response

Key Truth

Why is God's testimony a firmer authority than personal experience?

Personal Reflection

Which experience or opinion have you allowed to govern your understanding of the Bible?

Action Step

What personal experience or strong opinion have you given more authority than God's Word? How will you test that conclusion by the Bible and accept correction if needed?

Personal Testimony Has Limits

A person can testify about what happened to them. They can honestly describe what they believed, felt or experienced, but personal testimony cannot establish doctrine.

Someone may say, *"This happened to me."* That may accurately describe the experience, but it does not automatically prove that the person's interpretation of what happened is correct.

The disciple must therefore distinguish between what happened and what the Bible says that experience means. An experience may be genuine while the explanation given to that experience may still need to be examined by Scripture.

This is why God's testimony must always remain greater than our own. Personal experience describes what we experienced, while God's Word establishes what is true.

The Word Protects Us From Deception

Peter's words are especially important because spiritual deception can appear convincing. Something does not need to appear obviously false in order to lead a person away from truth.

An experience may appear supernatural, a speaker may sound sincere and a testimony may be emotionally powerful. A large number of people may even claim to have experienced the same thing.

None of these things can replace the authority of Scripture. The disciple must continue to give heed to the *"more sure word."*

The Word of God provides light when experiences are confusing. It gives us a dependable standard that does not change according to emotion, personal interpretation or the experiences of others.

Testimony Should Confirm Truth

A healthy personal testimony should agree with God's testimony. Our experience should bear witness to the truth rather than attempting to redefine it.

If Jesus Christ has saved us, our life should bear witness to that salvation. If His Word has changed our thinking, our conduct should begin to reflect that truth.

If Christ dwells within, our testimony should point people towards Him rather than towards an experience. The believer possesses the Person, and the Person must remain greater than anything we have experienced.

This keeps personal testimony in its proper place. Our testimony says, *"This is what Jesus Christ has done in my life,"* while God's testimony establishes what is true.

Our experience therefore stands beneath the authority of God's Word. Personal testimony can illustrate truth, but it cannot create or redefine truth.

God's Word Remains the Standard

The disciple does not need to fear examining spiritual experiences carefully. Truth can withstand examination, and genuine spiritual understanding will agree with the Word of God.

If an experience agrees with Scripture, there is no conflict. If an interpretation of an experience does not agree with Scripture, we must remain with Scripture.

The final authority is not emotion, tradition or another person's testimony. Neither is the final authority our own experience.

The final authority is the Word of God. Personal testimony can encourage us, but God's testimony establishes truth.

Our experiences must agree with God's Word because His testimony is always greater than our own.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should the Bible correct even a deeply felt personal account?

Personal Reflection

Have you treated the strength of an experience as proof that it is true?

Action Step

Have you assumed that a deeply felt experience must be from God? What teaching of the Bible will you use to examine it, and how will you respond if it disagrees with God's Word?

LIVING EPISTLES: WITNESSES OF JESUS CHRIST

BACK TO CONTENTS

The testimony of a disciple should be seen in both words and life. Jesus did not call His disciples simply to know the Gospel. He called them to become witnesses of Him.

Jesus said in **Acts 1:8**:

> *"But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth."*

To be a witness of Jesus Christ means that our words and our lives should bear testimony to Him. The disciple should therefore ask, *"Does my life agree with what I say I believe?"*

Witnesses of Jesus Christ

A witness gives evidence of what is known to be true. Christian testimony should therefore point people towards Jesus Christ and what He has done.

We speak of His salvation and His truth. We also speak of what He has done in our lives and the spiritual life we have received through Him.

However, our testimony must be supported by the way we live. If our words speak of Jesus Christ while our conduct continually contradicts His Word, our witness becomes confused.

The life should support the testimony of the mouth. What we confess about Jesus Christ should become increasingly visible through our conduct.

Living Epistles

Paul described believers in a remarkable way. He wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:2-3**:

> *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men: Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart."*

Paul called them an *"epistle of Christ."* An epistle is a letter, so the disciple becomes, in a sense, a living letter that other people can read.

People may not immediately open a Bible, but they will observe the lives of those who claim to follow Jesus Christ. They will notice our words, conduct and the way we treat other people.

They will also notice how we respond when life becomes difficult. This is why testimony involves more than speaking because the life itself should bear witness to Jesus Christ.

John Bore Record of Jesus Christ

John described his own testimony in **Revelation 1:2**:

> *"Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw."*

John *"bare record"* of what God had revealed. He did not keep that testimony to himself, but bore witness to the Word of God and Jesus Christ.

Yet John's testimony was not simply knowledge. The truth he received became something he lived and was prepared to stand for.

John continued in **Revelation 1:3**:

> *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."*

Notice the progression: read, hear and keep. The Word must move beyond knowledge and become part of the way the disciple lives.

Not Human Eloquence

Paul understood that testimony did not depend upon impressive speech. The effectiveness of a witness is not determined by how polished or eloquent the speaker appears.

Paul wrote in **1 Corinthians 2:1**:

> *"And I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God."*

He continued in **1 Corinthians 2:4**:

> *"And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power:"*

Paul's confidence was not in human eloquence. The power of his witness came from the truth he declared and the life of God demonstrated through him.

The disciple therefore does not need to be a gifted speaker before becoming a witness of Jesus Christ. A simple testimony spoken truthfully and supported by a faithful life can bear clear witness to Him.

Live by the Word

Jesus said in **Matthew 4:4**:

> *"But he answered and said, It is written, Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God."*

The Word of God is not given only to increase our knowledge. It is given to be received, believed and lived.

As the disciple hears, believes and obeys God's Word, that truth becomes visible through the life. The things we have learned from Scripture begin to shape our words, attitudes, choices and conduct.

This is the meaning of becoming a living epistle. We do not simply tell people what Jesus Christ teaches; we allow His Word and His life within us to become visible in the way we live.

The strongest testimony therefore brings together three things: the Word we believe, the Christ we confess and the life we live. These should agree rather than giving different messages.

When the Word we believe, the Christ we confess and the life we live agree, the disciple becomes a clear witness of Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How can a believer be a living letter that witnesses to Christ?

Personal Reflection

What part of your conduct obscures the message you speak?

Action Step

What behaviour in your daily life could confuse someone listening to your testimony? What will you change so that your words and actions together point towards Jesus Christ?

GOING FORWARD AS A DISCIPLE

BACK TO CONTENTS

The purpose of these Study Guides is not simply to increase biblical knowledge. The aim is to help each believer become a stronger disciple of Jesus Christ: someone who knows the truth, lives the truth and is able to help others understand it.

As we continue, the teaching will require greater thought, study and personal responsibility. The disciple must learn not only to read what is written, but also to search the Scriptures carefully and allow the Bible to interpret the Bible.

Isaiah wrote in **Isaiah 28:10**:

> *"For precept must be upon precept, precept upon precept; line upon line, line upon line; here a little, and there a little:"*

Truth must be established carefully and harmoniously from the Word of God. The disciple therefore learns to compare Scripture with Scripture rather than building understanding upon isolated verses.

Take Ownership of What You Believe

As your understanding grows, it is important that biblical truth becomes your own conviction. It is not enough simply to repeat what someone else believes or has taught you.

The disciple should move beyond saying, *"This is what my church teaches," "This is what my pastor says,"* or *"This is what I was taught."* We should become able to say, *"I have searched the Word of God, and this is what I believe."*

This does not mean becoming independent, proud or unwilling to learn from others. It means taking personal responsibility before God for what we believe and making sure that our convictions are established in His Word.

If something is not clear, continue studying rather than pretending to understand. If you disagree with something being taught, examine the Scriptures carefully and honestly rather than simply accepting or rejecting it.

The purpose is not to produce the expected answer. The goal is truth.

Truth Must Become Life

Understanding alone is not enough because truth must move from the page into the life. What we learn should increasingly influence the way we think, speak, choose and live.

John wrote in **Revelation 1:3**:

> *"Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein: for the time is at hand."*

Notice the progression: read, hear and keep. The disciple must do more than discover truth because we are also called to live it.

As biblical understanding increases, our conduct, choices and attitudes should increasingly agree with what God has revealed. Truth that has been understood should become truth that is lived.

Study and Meditate

Careful study requires time and discipline, but study must also lead to meditation. The disciple needs time to think carefully about what has been read and allow the truth to become established within.

God said to Joshua in **Joshua 1:8**:

> *"This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."*

Notice that meditation was connected with obedience: *"that thou mayest observe to do."* The purpose was not simply to know what the Word said, but to live according to it.

The purpose of study is therefore not simply to finish a Study Guide quickly. Take time to think about the Scriptures, compare verses, pray and consider how the truth should affect your life.

Learn So That You Can Help Others

Discipleship does not end with personal understanding. What we learn and live should eventually help someone else grow in Jesus Christ.

Paul wrote in **2 Timothy 2:2**:

> *"And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also."*

This gives us a simple pattern: Learn the way. Live the way. Show the way. The disciple first receives truth, then lives according to that truth and eventually becomes able to help another person understand and follow it.

As we continue, the question will increasingly become more than *"What do I know?"* We must also ask, *"Am I following Jesus Christ faithfully, and am I becoming able to help someone else follow Him?"*

That prepares us naturally for the next stage of discipleship: following Christ and making disciples.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How should worship, fellowship, and testimony continue as discipleship grows?

Personal Reflection

Which practice has faded since you began following Christ?

Action Step

Has worship, fellowship or witness become an occasional habit rather than an expression of Christ's life? Which area needs renewed attention, and what will you do this week?

CONCLUSION: A LIFE OF WORSHIP, FELLOWSHIP AND TESTIMONY

BACK TO CONTENTS

Worship, fellowship and testimony are not separate parts of the Christian life. They are three expressions of the life of Jesus Christ within the born-again believer.

We worship because Jesus Christ is worthy, and we fellowship because His life joins His people together. We testify because the truth and life we have received should be seen and shared.

Jesus said in **John 4:23**:

> *"But the hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and in truth: for the Father seeketh such to worship him."*

True worship begins in the heart and is not confined to a building, programme or outward form. In the New Covenant, Jesus Christ dwells within His people, and our whole life should honour Him.

Fellowship in Christ

Fellowship is also more than simply gathering in the same place. It begins with the spiritual life believers share in Jesus Christ.

John wrote in **1 John 1:7**:

> *"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."*

True fellowship is spiritual. It is the shared life of born-again believers who are walking in the light and joined together in Jesus Christ.

That fellowship should also become practical. Believers pray together, encourage one another, share the Word, care for one another, serve and gather together to edify the body.

A Testimony That Can Be Seen

The disciple is also called to be a witness of Jesus Christ. Our testimony should be heard through our words and seen through the way we live.

Paul wrote in **2 Corinthians 3:2**:

> *"Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:"*

Our testimony is not only what we say because people also read our lives. They see our conduct, attitudes, choices and the way we respond to the circumstances of life.

The Word we believe, the Christ we confess and the life we live should agree. As we continue growing as disciples, truth must become more than knowledge because it must become personal conviction and daily practice.

A Life Centred in Jesus Christ

Worship directs our hearts towards Jesus Christ, while fellowship expresses the life we share with His people. Testimony allows that same life and truth to become visible to others.

These three areas therefore come from the same source. Jesus Christ within the born-again believer is the life from which worship, fellowship and testimony flow.

We worship Jesus Christ with the whole heart and share His life with His people. We also bear witness to Him through both our words and our lives.

This is the life of a disciple. A life of worship, fellowship and testimony is a life that continually points to Jesus Christ.

Personal Response

Key Truth

How do worship, fellowship, and testimony express one life in Jesus Christ?

Personal Reflection

Where does your current pattern show a gap between belief and practice?

Action Step

Look honestly at your present pattern of worship, fellowship and testimony. What is missing, and how will you make one lasting change that expresses Jesus Christ through your daily life?

SUBMISSION TO COGMA FOR APPRAISAL

Instructions

Complete this section after you have finished the Study Guide. It must be completed online.

The link is located at the bottom of the online Study Guide — https://cogma.com.au/study-guides/

Your answers should reflect your understanding, your personal response, and how you intend to live by the truth you have studied. Answer honestly and be specific.

1. Main Truth

How do worship, fellowship, and testimony grow from a life shared with Jesus Christ rather than three separate religious activities?

2. Understanding

What does it mean to worship the Father in spirit and truth under the New Covenant, and why must worship shape the whole life rather than a performance?

3. Personal Reflection

Where has your worship become outward routine while your heart or conduct has resisted the truth you profess? Give a specific example.

4. Response to Truth

How will fellowship with God change the way you seek unity and strengthen another believer at your next gathering?

5. Action Step

Which believer will you encourage in fellowship this week, and what specific act of care will you offer? Say when you will do it.

6. Early Response

Have you already encouraged a believer in fellowship through a specific act of care? If yes, briefly explain what you did or what changed. If not, explain what prevented you from beginning.

7. Ongoing Practice

What continuing practice will keep your worship, fellowship, and testimony rooted in Jesus Christ instead of occasional meetings or experiences?

8. Doctrinal Clarity

Why must God's testimony in the Bible govern a personal testimony, even when a powerful experience seems to suggest something different?

9. Living the Truth

How will you share a truthful account of Christ's work in your life while directing attention to Him and caring for the person listening?

10. Final Response

After studying Worship, Fellowship and Testimony, how will living before God, building up His people, and witnessing to Christ shape your discipleship?