

A HEALTHY FELLOWSHIP

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Shalom,

Did the sweet songs which we sang come out from the depth of our hearts or we just sang unemotionally? The Lord knows our heart best. Similarly in listening to the Word of God, do we pick it and say amen only that part which suits our taste? Remember, all (the promises) the Word of God is 'yes' and 'amen' (2 Corinthians 1:20).

How about the letter of Apostle Paul to the congregation in Philippi written in prison and now it has been canonized as the Word of God? Philippians 1:21-26 write, *"For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. If I am **to go on living** in the body, this will mean **fruitful labor** for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! I am torn between the two: I desire **to depart and be with Christ**, which is better by far, but **it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body**. Convinced of this, I know that **I will remain**, and I will continue with all of you for **your progress and joy in the faith**, so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me."*

To summarize, the verses above are divided into two big groups, they are:

- Verses 21-23 showed the indecision of Paul when he must choose to depart (die) and be with Christ or remain in this world.
- Verses 24-26 showed his faith to be released out of jail and lived with the congregation in Philippi. Even though Apostle Paul was in prison, absolutely he had his life-purpose. For example, he wanted to live and remain with the congregation of Philippians. We know that James was imprisoned and never got freedom until he was executed. Peter, too, was put into jail but he was released then continued his ministry. Many servants of God had been put into prison but eventually they were released amazingly and could spread the Living-Word again. But for Paul, he wanted and was sure to live with the congregation of Philippians.

We must have faith in the Word of God written by the inspiration of Holy Spirit through the various writers. If we don't have faith, we will grieve Holy Spirit. To be honest, we have no ability to have

faith unless the Holy Spirit helps us. It was all because of the sins of our forefathers.

What was Apostle Paul's intention to live together (have fellowship) with the congregation in Philippi? Be alert, many fellowships occurred but ended with dispute and divisions. It was far different from what Apostle Paul longed for the fellowship with the congregation of Philippians that is to increase and rejoice in faith. Paul really cared for the Philippians who contributed and *supported* his ministry eagerly (Philippians 4:14-17), whereas the congregations whom Paul set up didn't care for him. Even to the Corinthians, Paul said that he had labored and toiled to provide himself and also took care of the whole church (2 Corinthians 11:27-28).

Apostle Paul had his **reason and preparation** when he walked out of the prison that was fruitful labor. Of course, it was not easy for him (as a believer) to make preparation when imprisoned because all his moves were under surveillance. He was not selfish or planned to 'revenge' to those that put him into jail but focused on how to make the church in progress and rejoice in faith when they had a chance to live in this world.

Frankly, each of us is afraid of death but what is **our reason to live** (free of being chained like Paul)? As believers, we **live for God in Christ** Jesus (Romans 6:11) and **bear fruit**.

'Fruitful labor' is related to tree/plant. Illustration: when we plant seed-bearing plant, we are not satisfied seeing it is just leafy and flowering but we want it to be fruitful. To be fruitful, is not enough to rely on sunlight, wind, enough water (rain) but we also have to work and prepare: provide essential nutrients for growth, control temperature and humidity right, anticipate pests and diseases early on, cut/prune dry branches etc. In other words, to produce "fruit" we must work. Is not to succeed in work/business, we must prepare by studying and working hard? The Word of God itself confirms that he who does not work, is lazy, let him not eat (2 Thessalonians 3:10).

The Apostle Paul encouraged the Corinthians to stand firm, not to be shaken but to be always active in the work of the Lord (1 Corinthians 15:58). He himself gave the example of laboring and toiling day and night so as not to burden anyone (2 Thessalonians 3: 7-8) and was proven by the grace, he worked harder than the other apostles (1 Corinthians 15:10) to produce fruit.

What was our condition before meeting Jesus Christ? Did we not previously work and become slaves of sin (Romans 6:17)? We were lazy to work/serve God, like to delay work/ministry or just want to

work/serve if it comes to profits and so on.

The taste we want **depends on what kind of tree** we plant, because each seed produces fruit with **different flavors and efficacies**. Examples: the taste and nutritional value of figs differ from those of grapes or those of pomegranates. Similarly, **the fruit of the Holy Spirit** produces nine different flavors: love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control (Galatians 5:22). The lovely person is different from the gentle one, etc.

Do not forget that we are just a branch that cannot stand on its own but must stick to Jesus as a vine. In order to be fruitful, we must be prepared/willing to cleanse ourselves (John. 15: 1-5) - discard our pride and all our fleshly practices (Galatians 5: 19-21). The entire process of cleansing / purification takes place according to God's measurement to produce the right flavor. For example, trees that are not exposed to the sun or too much watered will produce poor fruit.

Question: have we (who are free) really worked for God? What fruit flavors do we offer in our environment? Remember, we are chosen (we do not choose) and ordained by God to bear fruit and even **bear fruit** that is **to love one another** (John 15: 16-17). In fact, we often choose churches and pastors that fit our tastes. That is why the number of many churches *gets smaller* because the members of the congregation often move to other churches.

We must return to the Great Shepherd who has chosen us before the world was made (Ephesians 1: 4). If we believe in the gospel of salvation, we are sealed by the Holy Spirit (v. 13). In the early church era after Pentecost, the apostles realized that they had been appointed as witnesses to Him and went to the ends of the earth to make disciples of all nations. Indeed, before being filled with the Holy Spirit, they failed to follow Jesus as Judas Iscariot betrayed his Master, Peter denied Him, the disciples left Him alone on the cross but the conditions changed completely after they were filled with the promised Holy Spirit, they were even willing to die martyrs.

If we have permanent fruit (love), we must go first to our close people (husband, wife, children, parents, relatives, friends, etc.) and love them by accepting and forgiving all their weaknesses. As followers of Jesus, we should deny ourselves and take up the cross (Matthew 16:24).

What fruit does God want from us? **The fruit of righteousness** which worked out by Jesus Christ before His second coming to glorify God (Philippians 1:10-11).

How to bear (fruit) the righteousness? Through **faith in Jesus Christ**, we are justified and transformed to yield the fruit of righteousness (Roman 3:22).

Both **servants of God** and **churches** must be filled with the fruits of righteousness and live in holiness and blameless before the day of Christ. When these two parties (servants of God and church) **work together** to bear fruit, **there will be a healthy fellowship**. Do not be too demanding that the servant of God be fruitful but the church is passive or abusive! Example: the church of Galatians was initially faithful to the gospel of Christ which was preached by the Apostle Paul and welcomed him as an angel of God, even willing to close their eyes to be given to him (Paul had trouble with his eyes) but when Paul left elsewhere, they received another gospel that twisted the gospel of Christ later regarded Paul as an enemy (Galatian 1: 6-7; 4: 13-16).

The Apostle Paul worked **hard** not to seek physical gain. When we look back, Adam-Eve who lived in the Garden of Eden, received the authority to manage hundreds or even thousands of kinds of fruit trees. Of course they worked hard but did it joyfully and the activity made their marriage relationship healthy. Much different after they fell into sin, Adam had to struggle and sweat to find sustenance to produce fruit that would please his wife and children so did Eve in giving birth and pleasing her husband. Admittedly, it is not easy to bear fruit that pleases husband, wife, parents, children, congregation and so on. Quite often the pastor tries to please the congregation using world philosophy and invite famous artists to enliven worship events. Once again, there must be mutual cooperation from the two parties (husband and wife; parent-child, pastor-congregation, etc.) to work hard to bear fruit so that a healthy fellowship can take place.

Actually the Apostle Paul would rather go (die) and dwell with Christ because this is far better. Did one of the criminals crucified next to Jesus beg Him to save him from the cross so that he could go home and reunite with his family? No, instead he asked that Jesus would remember him when He comes as King. And Jesus agreed that the same day the criminal would be with Him in Paradise (Luke 23: 42-43).

We should also have the same desire to dwell with Christ. Even if we still live a long life in this world, we must have a purpose in life to have healthy fellowship with one another. Notice, Jesus brings blessings when we work hard and are loyal to Him but rebukes if we are lazy and neglect to serve Him.

Application: Servant of God should not complain when it comes to 'sudden' tasks; instead, he must be grateful that he is still given the opportunity to have a fellowship with the church. Spiritual

leaders should have the heart to love those they lead. Of course, we can invite guest speakers but keep in mind if they have the same heart as ours. Example: the church in Corinth had many shortcomings that saddened the Apostle Paul but he did not want to leave them. Is it not because of love that Jesus is willing to die for us? Not because we are good, because we're just worthless clay at all.

We breathe the free gift of God (oxygen) to keep us alive; dead people can no longer breathe oxygen. We live because of Jesus and His life is in our lives. Once He leaves us, we are no longer alive. That is why it is the love of Jesus who saved us and gave us (eternal) life. It should be noted that the nature of the Trinity is love being united; that is why the Trinity is closely related to one another. May husband and wife (as well as the fellowship one with another) become more closely in waiting for the Lord's second coming.

Healthy fellowship affects the progress of faith and more joy in faith. The progress of faith cannot be separated from hearing the Word of Christ (Roman 10:17) neither from the good preaching of the pastor nor from the beautiful worldly philosophy. In fact, many sermons at the pulpit were 'unhealthy' since the church was shaken by false teachings. We must pray because the congregation of any church is the apple of God's eye.

There must be a beautiful partnership - the pastor needs the church and the congregation needs the pastor - to produce fruit. If there is no meeting point on both sides, there is an erroneous fellowship as happened in the Corinthian church where there was a division (1 Corinthians 11: 17-19) - some were pro-Paul, Apollos, Cephas, Christ (1 Corinthian 1:12).

Remember, the church is just a container and we choose a church with the purpose of a healthy and good *fellowship* to honor the Name of Christ. Illustration: luxury cars such as Mercedes, BMWs to Innova are just a container but what's important is that the passengers are driven to the right destination.

On other occasions, we must maintain the Lord's Supper for unity. Ironically, the churches use the same verse when using the Lord's Supper but more and more divisions occur in them because each feels his church is the purest etc. True and healthy fellowship focuses on glorifying Jesus Christ and extending His sacrifice as John said, "*We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And **our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son, Jesus Christ.***" (1 John 1: 3)

Undeniably, forming a healthy fellowship is not easy because of so

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much talk that can cause friction and weaken the integrity of the community. Is not Jesus - the Word - also mocked and insulted not by the common people but by the Pharisees, the scribes, chief priests who knew much about the Law? Spiritual leaders should be able to guard their mouths to prevent division in fellowship.

Our fellowship has blood marks/cross just like the early church fellowship that was strong and firm because they upheld Jesus' sacrifice. Beware, if we say we have fellowship with Him and yet live in darkness, we lie and do not do the truth. But if we live in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another and the blood of Jesus, His Son, cleanses us from all sins (1 John. 1: 6-7).

The beautiful and healthy fellowship must be *back to the Bible*. We should not exalt/adore a priest to make him fall into destruction. Only the Word of God (not a priest) can turn a bad character into a good one; thus, the Name of God is honored. Amen.

Video selengkapnya dapat disimak di [Ibadah Umum - Persekutuan yang Sehat" Pdt. Paulus Budiono.](#)