

# PathLights

*"Your word is a lamp to my feet  
and a light to my path"  
Psalm 119:104*

June 12, 2016

## Social Circles

by Frank Himmel

Acts 2 records the establishment of the church. Peter preached that salvation is attained by calling on the name of the Lord, and that God has made Jesus both Lord and Christ. Those who were receptive to his preaching were baptized into Christ for forgiveness of sins; "and there were added that day about three thousand souls" (v. 41).

Added to what? Obviously, they were added to Christ. Those who have been baptized into Him belong to Him (Galatians 3:27-29). They were added to the church (v. 47, KJV), which is Christ's body (Colossians 1:18). Or, we could say it this way: they were added to each other. As fellow-members of Christ's body and fellow-partakers of His blessings, they had a new "one another" relationship, with incumbent blessings and responsibilities.

The synopsis of their history at the end of the chapter identifies three expressions of that "one another" relationship: (1) They worshiped together; (2) They shared their possessions to provide for those among them who were in need; (3) They spent time together socially. "And day by day continuing with one mind in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, they were taking their meals together with gladness and sincerity of heart" (v. 46).

A few years later gospel preaching was expanded to include Gentiles as well as Jews. For some, that strained the "one another" sense, both religiously and socially. Consider Paul's account of what happened at Antioch:

For when Cephas [Peter] came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he stood condemned. For prior to the coming of certain men from James, he used to eat with the Gentiles; but when they came, he began to withdraw and hold himself aloof, fearing the party of the circumcision. And the rest of the Jews joined him in hypocrisy, with the result that even Barnabas was carried away by their hypocrisy (Galatians 2:11-13).

Antioch was among the first "mixed" churches (Jew and Gentile). Now this group which had been united was beginning to become estranged. In this case, social division grew out of prejudice and fear.

### Application

The problem of cliques within a church has certainly not disappeared. As at Antioch, the first and most ▶



obvious evidence of it is typically in the social setting. The same few folks are constantly together, only rarely including others.

By no means are these narrow groups always purposeful. They often spring from natural circumstances. Adults in the same age group find much in common. Families whose children are the same ages or have similar interests readily seek each other out. Brethren who live in the same part of the community find it easier to get together. Family relations heighten the tendency. And perhaps the most obvious factor, most of us prefer to be around the folks we personally hit it off with best.

These natural associations are fine as long as they do not become exclusive or nearly so. In that case, others feel unappreciated and inferior. Newcomers wonder whether they will ever be accepted. Countless opportunities for service are missed because we haven't taken the time to really get to know others outside our little group. Unity suffers.

Am I guilty? Take a self-test. Do I *always* speak to some people at services and *never* to others? Am I merely polite to some but only warm to a few? Am I consistently huddled in the parking lot with the same bunch? Do I routinely invite the same folks over for dinner or out to eat? How often do I include others? What have I done to make the new folks feel welcome? What do I do to reach out to those who are older or younger than I? Do I have any interest in changing if my answers to these questions aren't the best?



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One more thing. This is a two-way street. We need to be available, be friendly, and take some initiative ourselves if we expect others to be receptive toward us. "A man who has friends must himself be friendly" (Proverbs 18:24a, NKJV). ■

<b>Service Leaders for the Week</b>			
	<b>Sunday Morning</b>	<b>Sunday Evening</b>	<b>Wednesday Evening</b>
GREETER	Paul Richmond	Carlos Garcia	David Gray
SONG LEADER	Bruce Williams	Clifton Lefort	John Baucom
OPENING PRAYER	Gary Hagler	Greg Winget	
LORD'S SUPPER			
BREAD	J B Williams	J B Williams	
CUP	Adam Gibson	Adam Gibson	
CONTRIBUTION PRAYER	Albert Lee Harrison		
SERMON/INVITATION	Frank Himmel	Frank Himmel	Chris Brooks
CLOSING PRAYER	Jason Chandler	Don Rapp	Kerry Gray