

Christian Fellowship

Michael Hatcher, Editor

1998 Bellview Lectures

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PREFACE

I want to thank the elders of the Bellview Church of Christ for the foresight and leadership for making this lectureship and book possible. Paul Brantley, Bill Gallaher, and Fred Stancliff are men who have seen the need and are doing their part in meeting that need. They have built upon work the elders and leaders, of this congregation started in the past. Appreciation is also extended to the deacons of Bellview congregation: Henry Born, Elward Brantley, Gerald Caine, Bill Crowe, Louis Herrington, Jim Loy, Harold Maxey, and Richard Parker. They along with the faithful members of this congregation work overtime in preparing for the lectureship, and their work behind the scenes during this time is invaluable. They lovingly follow the lead of the bishops of this church. Because of everyone's work, the lectureship is able to run smoothly.

Lectureships, such as this one, would not be possible without the generous gift of preachers who give of their time and knowledge in writing these manuscripts and then presenting them orally during the lectures. These men spend hours in preparation for their lesson. They are donating their time and effort because they have a love for God, His Word, and that great church for which Jesus died. The men who are on this lectureship have been tested and proven in their soundness and love for and willingness to defend and propagate the Scriptures. We thank them for their willingness and work.

Fellowship is a wonderful and precious gift from God. It is a trait that we often do not fully appreciate nor realize. To realize that we can enjoy a oneness and unity with God Almighty (Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is almost beyond comprehension. Then we have a wonderful fellowship and unity with our brethren. David observed, "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). However, there are perils in our fellowship both with God and man. There are false doctrines and practices with which we must concern ourselves. This book is placed before our brethren with the intent that it will help us come to a greater understanding of all the aspects of fellowship. We have also discussed the withdrawal of that fellowship and some of the false teachings (including book reviews) dealing with this great subject. It is our prayer that this book will be a great benefit to the kingdom of God.

Michael Hatcher, Director
March 18, 1998

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WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP?

Noah A. Hackworth



Noah A. Hackworth was born in Oklahoma but grew up in California. He is married to the former Glenda Nunley, and they have three children. He was educated in California colleges with a major in Speech and pursued Advanced Biblical Studies from Pepperdine, continuing under a private tutor.

Noah completed thirty years of work with the church of Christ in San Mateo, California. In 1996 he resigned the work in San Mateo and accepted the work at the West Visalia Church of Christ in Visalia, California. Presently, he is Co-Director of the Annual Greater Visalia Firm Foundation Lectures. He has preached and/or held meetings in ten states. He has made two trips to Singapore and three trips to Ethiopia to preach the Gospel.

INTRODUCTION

Because fellowship is of tremendous importance to the children of God, volumes by the most able brethren among us have already been written on the subject. “If they should be written every one, I suppose that even the world itself would not contain the books that should be written” (John 21:25) is a statement that characterizes the things Jesus did. Fellowship is somewhat like this because of the abundance of material that relates to it.

THE FIRST APPEARANCE

It is commonly agreed that the word *fellowship* makes an unforgettable appearance in the New Testament in Acts 2:42 in relation to the dispensing of funds. “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers.” Errett says:

If it can be said to have any definite meaning among us, it is understood to signify the weekly contribution of money for benevolent purposes. Taking this as its strict import, there has been among us no other such instance of trifling with a divine ordinance; for the paltry contribution, week by week, of dimes and half-dimes by one-fourth or one-fifth of the members present at a church meeting, is a shameful slurring over of any just idea of fellowship in a solemn duty enjoined on all the saints. It is a custom, we take it, “more honored in the breach than in the observance;” for there is just enough done to lull

the conscience of the selfish into quietness, and to belittle one's ideas of Christian benevolence, while, for all the great purposes of the true church life, it is so significant as to merit only contempt. It is offering the bran to God and keeping the flour for ourselves.¹

To fully appreciate and grasp the impact that fellowship makes on the heart, we need to be refreshed concerning the context of Acts 2. Pentecost had finally arrived. It was on this day that the most important things in religious history began to be fulfilled. J. W. Brents describes the importance of this day as a Jewish festival:

The great Jewish festivals were notable events. They were major factors in their national life. Their religion, their literature, their character as a people were largely influenced by these great assemblies. The inspiring fellowship, their mutual love, the memory of outstanding providences of God would strengthen every heart. It was in Jerusalem where God recorded his name. It was there he had promised to meet with his people. In this city they worshipped the God of their fathers...

There have been many great and notable days in the history of the world. On many of these days so great were the events which were enacted that multiplied millions were affected by them. Great crises in human history have taken place in a day when the currents of power that govern the nations take new directions and burst asunder the barriers and bounds of the ages...

The living, vital roots of Christianity were planted deep upon the day of Pentecost. Its great outstanding facts were unfolded by the Spirit of God upon that history making day. Upon this day a new era and epoch had their beginning in the annals of time. The facts of Pentecost should be planted in the heart of every Christian and in the hearts of all men, as to that matter. To forget them or even by-pass them is fatal to any Christian. When we become indifferent to such essential truths we become lukewarm in promoting them. The more greatly imbued we are with them the more zeal we show in making them known to others.²

From these comments we grasp the importance of fellowship. It was an activity involving those obedient souls on Pentecost, and its beauty and privilege should indeed be planted in the heart of every Christian. To ignore the blessings of fellowship is to deprive ourselves of an intimate unity between ourselves and the Lord. Our obligation therefore is to continually promote it, knowing that as we do, it will become even more important.

DEFINITION

According to reputable Greek lexicons (Thayer, Arndt & Gingrich, Robinson, Bagster, et al.) the word “fellowship” translates the noun *koinonia* and the verb *koinoneo*, which mean communion, fellowship, sharing, communication, contribution, partaker and partner, companion, etc. The verb occurs some eight times:

Communicating to the necessities of the saints (Rom. 12:13).

For if the Gentiles have been made **partakers** (Rom. 15:27).

No church had **fellowship** with me (Phi. 4:15).

Neither be **partaker** of other men’s sins (1 Tim. 5:22).

But let him that is taught in the word **communicate** unto him (Gal. 6:6).

Since then the children are **sharers** in flesh and blood (Heb. 2:14).

But insomuch as ye are **partakers** of Christ’s sufferings (1 Pet. 4:13).

For he that giveth him greeting **partaketh** in his evil works (2 John 11).

Attention must also be given to the verb *sunkoinoneo*, which means to have fellowship with a thing, to participate in, to take part in, to mix oneself up with a thing. “And have no **fellowship** [*sunkoinoneite*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). The things in this passage with which we are not to have fellowship are the unfruitful works of darkness which includes the fellowship of heathen religious rites and mysteries. The thrust of this passage is supported by Revelation 18:4: “Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no **fellowship** [*sunkoinonesete*] with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.” “Ye did well that ye had **fellowship** with my affliction” (Phi. 4:14). Paul echoed this sentiment in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18:

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters.

These five verses teach us that (1) there can be no unequal yoking with unbelievers; (2) righteousness does not have fellowship with iniquity; (3) light hath no communion with darkness; (4) there is no concord of Christ with Belial; and (5) there is no agreement between the temple of God and idols.

FELLOWSHIP IS A STATE INTO WHICH WE ARE CALLED

“God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). Here, in the noun form, fellowship is considered as a *state*, means “a condition or mode of being with regard to a set of circumstances; a position.” How does one get into this “mode of being” or “position”? He is “called into it.” To the Thessalonians Paul wrote, “To the end that ye should walk worthily of God, who calleth you into his own kingdom and glory” (1 The. 2:12). To the same people, he added, “Whereunto he called you through our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 The. 2:14). These two passages teach that: (1) God issues a call to all men; (2) the instrument by which the call is effected is the gospel of Christ; (3) the “gospel call” includes obedience to the conditions contained in the instrument by which the calling is made; (4) the result or blessing that issues as a result of this calling is fellowship with God and His Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Those who are in fellowship with the Father and the Son are naturally in fellowship with each other. This *state* remains valid as long as people walk in the light and comply with His commandments.

FELLOWSHIP IS MADE POSSIBLE BY SONSHIP

Sonship precedes fellowship. In fact, there can be no fellowship until there is first sonship. Sonship is available only in the family of God. In God’s family we have fellowship with Him and all His children. Paul said, “For ye are all sons of God, through faith, in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 3:26). It is actually through “the faith” (*tes pisteos*) that we are all sons of God. “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ did put on Christ” (Gal. 3:27). The word *for* translates the Greek *gar* and introduces the reason. Because we have been baptized into Christ, we are sons of God. It is imperative that we recognize the change of tenses in verses 26 and 27. In verse 26 it is stated “ye are,” present tense. Ye are all sons of God through the faith. In verse 27 it

is the past tense. Ye are the sons of God because you were baptized. The dignity of sonship is illustrated in Galatians 4:4-7:

but when the fulness of the time came, God sent forth his Son, born of a woman, born under the law, that he might redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. And because ye are sons, God sent forth the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying, Abba, Father. So that thou art no longer a bondservant, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God.

“Adoption of sons” is a metaphor, but a very expressive one, to express how God takes into his spiritual family both Jews and Gentiles who believe and obey the gospel. Paul often uses his metaphors and we must stay with the point of comparison he is making. To adopt is to receive the child of another as one’s own and to bestow upon it the affection, treatment, and privileges as one’s own child. Christians are spoken of by God as his adopted children. They are his by adoption. When the person has been fitted in heart and life by faith and repentance toward God, for the enjoyment of the privileges of the family of God, he is then by a burial out of his old family relations and a resurrection in the new ones adopted into the family of God. Baptism is the act of adoption by which one passes out of one family, and is brought into the new one with God as Father, Jesus Christ as our elder brother, and by which one acquires the right to the blessings and favors of the family of God. After we have been legally adopted into the family of God, we must drink more and more into the spirit of the family that we may not lose our fitness for its privileges and forfeit our rights to its inheritance.³

FELLOWSHIP IS LINKED WITH TEACHING

Teaching and fellowship are unquestionably related. Fellowship cannot exist unless there is an obedience to teaching. In his sermon on Pentecost, Peter said to his audience, “Ye men of Judaea, and all ye that dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and give ear unto my words” (Acts 2:14). Fellowship on Pentecost was established as a result of hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel. Acts 2:42 says, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ teaching and fellowship.” Notice that the reception of teaching preceded the enjoyment of fellowship. Not only must there be an obedience to teaching, there must be a continuance in it. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). The verb *walk* is the translation of *peripatomen*, and is present active which means that we must “keep on walking.” David Brown has succinctly shown the

relationship between Acts 2:42 and 1 John 1:7 by asking four true or false questions:

1. It is possible to “walk in the light” and not “continue stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” T F
2. It is possible to continue “stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine” and not “walk in the light.” T F
3. It is possible (from God’s point of view) to “have fellowship one with another” and not “walk in the light.” T F
4. It is possible (from God’s point of view) to “have fellowship one with another” and not continue “stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine.” T F⁴

All four questions are false of course because to walk in the light is to continue stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine. Also, careful attention needs to be paid to the fact that Paul re-baptized twelve men at Ephesus because of a discrepancy in the teaching they had received (Acts 19:1-7).

And it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper country came to Ephesus, and found certain disciples: and he said unto them, Did ye receive the Holy Spirit when ye believed? And they *said* unto him, Nay, we did not so much as hear whether the Holy Spirit was *given*. And he said, Into what then were ye baptized? And they said, Into John’s baptism. And Paul said, John baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people that they should believe on him that should come after him, that is, on Jesus. And when they heard this, they were baptized into the name of the Lord Jesus. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Spirit came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. And they were in all about twelve men.

If fellowship is not related to teaching, why did Paul re-baptize these men at Ephesus? The fact that Paul baptized them into Christ, into the fellowship, indicates that they were not in fellowship before they were baptized. Too, John said that it was the declaration of what he and the other apostles had heard and seen that made fellowship possible. “That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (1 John 1:3). Brother Gus Nichols commented:

Fellowship, then, must not be sought upon the basis of false doctrine, but by abiding in the realm of revealed truth, as it is in the Bible. God does not want a unity, or fellowship which is built upon compromis-

ing the word of God. We must believe, teach and follow the truth, whether or not we are in fellowship with any others claiming to be Christians. Fellowship automatically results from strictly believing and obeying the truth of the gospel; or in other words, by loyally following the teaching of the New Testament scriptures, under which we live today (II Tim. 2:15; Heb. 9:15-17).⁵

FELLOWSHIP IS THE RESULT OF UNITY

If there is unity, there can be fellowship, but both are based upon the commands of Christ. Whether we have unity and fellowship depends upon whether we are obedient (cf., John 14:15). In the very shadow of the cross, Jesus prayed: “For the words which thou gavest me I have given unto them; and they received them, and knew of a truth that I came forth from thee” (John 17:8). “I have given them thy word” (John 17:14). “Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us” (John 17:20-21). It was through the reception of the apostles’ word that the unity for which the Lord prayed was accomplished. Too, fellowship was enjoyed for the same reason.

FELLOWSHIP INVOLVES PARTNERSHIP

Thayer defines the verb *koinoneo* to mean “to make one’s self a sharer or a partner.” Since this is the case, it is correct to look upon the church as a partnership or firm in which there are partners. The divine partners are the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The human partners are those who have obeyed the gospel. The work of this partnership involves: (1) the evangelism of the world, and (2) keeping the saved, saved. When we enter this partnership, we bring with us all our capital and resources; we invest them for the benefit of the firm. The motto of each one who shares in this fellowship is: “But what I have, that give I thee” (Acts 3:6). One author said:

The mass of our membership exhaust their piety in church-going, sermon listening, and the payment of such trifling sums as must be paid to maintain a respectable standing. The genuine workers are few; so are the voluntary contributors. There is no consecration of all to Christ—no laying down of all our treasures at the apostles’ feet. The result is leanness, barrenness, impotency. We are smitten with mildew and blasting—the locusts and caterpillars eat up our substance. We receive as we give. We give little to God, and we receive little in return. We are shut out from the highest joys of spiritual fellowship, because we shut ourselves out from its highest duties. We are looking

for happiness in a wrong direction. We seek it in selfishness, in ease, in the world's voluptuousness; it is found in giving, in toiling, in suffering, in condescension, in compassion, in self-denial for others' good.⁶

FALSE CONCEPTS OF FELLOWSHIP

Much of the present-day noise we are hearing about fellowship are simply overtures from the Leroy Garrett–Carl Ketcherside days. Just as a soldier could not prepare himself for war if the trumpet gave an uncertain voice (cf., 1 Cor. 14:7), so these men articulated their concepts of fellowship in ways which could not be misunderstood. Many of today's false concepts of fellowship, therefore, can be undeniably traced to them. We shall therefore review a number of these concepts. First, nothing should ever be made a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of salvation. The New Testament is quite clear in the way in which the words *saved* and *salvation* are used. To the saints in Rome, Paul wrote, "And this, knowing the season, that already it is time for you to awake out of sleep: for now is salvation nearer to us than when we *first* believed" (Rom. 13:11). The *salvation* of this passage does not refer to the time when they first obeyed the gospel (cf., Rom. 6:3-5, 17-18; 16:17), but rather to "a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time" (1 Pet. 1:5), i.e., the salvation of the soul in heaven. To be *saved* conveys the idea of salvation from sin at the time of obedience. To the Corinthians, Paul said:

Now I make known unto you brethren, the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye received, wherein also ye stand, by which also ye are saved, if ye hold fast the word which I preached unto you, except ye believed in vain (1 Cor. 15:1-2).

It is unquestionable true that a person who had been saved from his sins through his obedience to the gospel, thus coming into the fellowship of God and the brethren, could involve himself in any number of things which could cause the loss of his soul. Such things as these (e.g., the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship) were not conditions of salvation to begin with, but they certainly would become a condition of going to heaven simply because they are unauthorized by the New Testament; hence, they are sinful. Next, fellowship is always with people, never with things. This is totally false! It has been pointed out elsewhere in this presentation that we are forbidden

to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). Added to this is the fact that Paul told Timothy to “Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). Finally, in Philippians 4:14-15, Paul stated:

Howbeit ye did well that ye had fellowship with my affliction. And ye yourselves also know, ye Philippians, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving but ye only.

The only correct conclusion that we can reach after we have examined these passages is that fellowship can involve things as well as people.

Next, fellowship is always a state or relationship into which we are called by God. No one will deny that this is true if we are viewing *koinonia* in its noun form, which is what Paul does in 1 Corinthians 1:9: “God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.” The nature of this calling and how it is effected has already been explained elsewhere. It involves obedience to the gospel by which people are called out of the world, in a spiritual and moral sense, into the kingdom of Christ.

Last, that fellowship is something that can never be extended or withdrawn is not remotely kin to truth. If we refuse to be a partaker of other men’s sins, have we not withheld our fellowship from those things? What was Timothy instructed not to do? Be a partaker of other men’s sins! When Paul came to Jerusalem

he assayed to join himself to the disciples: and they were all afraid of him, not believing that he was a disciple. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how at Damascus he had preached boldly in the name of Jesus (Acts 9:26-27).

The disciples were not at first too anxious to extend fellowship to Paul, because they, like Ananias, had “heard from many of this man, how much evil he did to thy saints at Jerusalem” (Acts 9:13). It was not until James, Cephas (Peter), and John had perceived that the grace of God had been given to Paul that they extended to him “the right hands of fellowship” (Gal. 2:9). That fellowship cannot be extended or withdrawn is palpably false.

TRUE CONCEPTS OF FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship can be perceived correctly. All of its implications can be understood, but in relation to it we need to be careful what we bind and/or loose on earth because the same things will be bound and/or loosed in heaven (cf., Mat. 18:18). True concepts of fellowship includes the following. First, that nothing should be made a test of fellowship which God has not made a condition of eternal salvation is unequivocally true. God has made eternal salvation conditional. There are things that can keep us out of heaven if we participate in them. To the Corinthians, Paul wrote:

Or know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

If the above things are practiced and unrepented of, they will keep those who participate in them out of heaven (cf., 2 Cor. 12:21). Keep in mind that these “things” affect eternal salvation.

Second, we cannot fellowship “any thing” or “anybody” that will keep us out of heaven. Hymenaeus and Philetus were men who had committed two grievous errors: (1) they contended that the resurrection had already past, and (2) as a result of their contention they had overthrown the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17-18). Is the resurrection a matter of doctrine? Absolutely! Will the denial of that fact keep us out of heaven? Indeed it will. Then we cannot have fellowship with people such as Hymenaeus and Philetus who are involved in doctrinal error, because God does not.

Third, in Galatians 5:19-21 there is a list of the works of the flesh which of course will keep anyone who practices them out of heaven. More directly Paul said, “Of which I forewarn you, even as I did forewarn you, that they who practise such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God” (Gal. 5:21). It is understood that these works of the flesh are not made conditions of becoming children of God, but of remaining so.

Fourth, in 1 Corinthians 5:1-5 there was a case of fornication which even the Gentiles would not tolerate. One had his father’s wife. Because the Corinthians were “puffed up” instead of being mournful, Paul stated:

For I verily, being absent in body but present in spirit, have already as though I were present judged him that hath so wrought this thing, in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (Gal. 5:3-5).

The delivery of the guilty party to Satan for the destruction of the flesh is equivalent to withholding fellowship from him.

Fifth, in Galatians 1:7-9, the “anathema” of God is pronounced upon the one (angel, apostle, or any man) who preaches “another gospel.” How can we retain fellowship with one who has been “anathematized”? Preaching a different gospel from that which the apostles preached will surely keep one out of heaven.

Sixth, in 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15 Paul urges the withdrawal of fellowship from those who were disorderly and busybodies. Why? Because the continuance of such things will keep one out of heaven. We are therefore required by apostolic authority to “note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed” (2 The. 3:14).

Finally, in 1 Timothy 4:1-3 Paul speaks of those who gave heed to the doctrines of demons. Does God have fellowship with such? Can we have fellowship with those who give heed to such?

FELLOWSHIP IS MORE THAN UNION

More correctly stated, fellowship is always a union, but a union is not always fellowship. To use a worn-out expression: you can tie the tails of two cats together and hang them over a fence; you would obviously have union, but you would not necessarily have unity. In genuine fellowship, agreement is almost always present. Agreement enhances fellowship. Two individuals could, however, be walking side by side and not be in conversational agreement. But if they were, the unity would be complete and the fellowship more sweet. Amos 3:2 says, “Shall two walk together, except they have agreed?” To whom does the word “two” refer? To prophets? God and the prophet? God and Israel? The evidence seems to favor the latter because: (1) God had chosen Israel above all others; (2) Israel’s conduct was not pleasing to God; (3) God had spoken against Israel; and (4) Israel had been threatened with punishment because of habitual sin. Assuming that the reference is to God and Israel, we become immediately

aware of the fact that we must be in harmony with the Divine Will if we are walking with God. To walk with God we must be in agreement with Him. In like manner, if two brethren are going to have fellowship with each other, agreement will enhance the relationship. Zerr has commented:

Two men might unexpectedly come together while each is out walking and that would not require any previous understanding, but they would not continue their walk together without it. Together is from *yachad* which Strong defines, "Properly a unit, i.e., (adverbially) unitedly." This means not only that the two might happen to walk in the same general direction, but that they were doing so as a unit of action. The statement (in question form) is that the men will not do so except they be agreed. That word is the key to the whole passage. It is from *yaad* and Strong's definition is, "A primitive root; to fix upon (by agreement or appointment); by implication to meet (at a stated time), to summon (to trial), to direct (in a certain quarter or position), to engage (for marriage)." Moffatt renders the word "have planned it."⁷

FELLOWSHIP AND DISAGREEMENT

Disagreement does not necessarily destroy fellowship provided the disagreement is over optional things. Consider a few examples. First, beginning with the disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts 15:39). The first preaching tour of Paul and Barnabas was very fruitful. They had preached the gospel, exhorted the disciples, and appointed elders in every church (Acts 14:23). Sometime later (after many days) a return trip was planned. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark, but Paul thought it not good to do so (Acts 15:38). A sharp contention arose between them which ended with Barnabas taking John Mark with him and Paul taking Silas with him (Acts 15:39-40). A disagreement certainly existed, but there is no indication that fellowship was destroyed. If it was, it had been restored by the time Paul penned 1 Corinthians 9:6 and 2 Timothy 4:11.

There is the controversy over the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Within the last decade especially, whether or not the Holy Spirit personally or literally indwells the Christian, has been the subject of heated discussion between some brethren. The disagreement has not been over the fact of the indwelling (Acts 2:38; 5:32; Rom. 8:9, 11) but the "how" (mode) of it (cf., Eph. 6:17). It is the consensus of many good brethren that disagreement can exist over this issue without destroying fellowship.

There are also good brethren among us who believe that women must have “a covering” on their heads when engaged in assembly worship (1 Cor. 11:5); others do not subscribe to this thinking, but it is believed that there is room for either view on this subject without breaking fellowship. It is not held that God will bar a woman from heaven if she does not wear a covering in addition to her hair.

Our brotherhood has been in unanimous agreement in the past that it is scriptural to provide for our widows and orphans (Jam. 1:27). One segment has determined that it is in harmony with biblical teaching for the church to provide for such care through the construction of homes for these orphans. Another segment has determined that a better way to meet this obligation is to take the homeless children into private homes. Good brethren can be found in abundance who will agree that private homes are certainly one way to fulfill the obligation, but there are a few who have vociferously affirmed that private homes are “the only way to care for them.” Hence, on this particular issue, disagreement actually destroyed fellowship. Those in favor of private homes simply “broke fellowship” with the rest of the brotherhood over this issue. From these examples it can be seen that disagreement does not necessarily destroy fellowship unless brethren **bind** their views upon others.

CONCLUSION

There is no question but that as “we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). We have examined fellowship in light of biblical teaching:

1. We have defined it.
2. It is linked with teaching.
3. It is a state into which we are called.
4. It is made possible by sonship.
5. It exists in unity.
6. It is a partnership.
7. There are false concepts connected with it.
8. There are true concepts of it.
9. It is more than union.
10. Disagreement doesn’t always destroy it.

May God help us to extend fellowship whenever we should, enjoy it as one of our greatest blessings, but withdraw it whenever it is needful.

ENDNOTES

¹Isaac Errett, *New Testament Christianity* (Columbus, Indiana: n.p., n.d.), 1:426.

²J. W. Brents, *The Great Day of Pentecost* (Austin, TX: Firm Foundation Pub. Co., 1958), pp. 11, 14, 17.

³J. Noel Meredith, *A Commentary On Galatians* (Lawrenceburg, TN: Meredith Pub. Co., 1981), p. 237.

⁴David Brown, "Fellowship With God And One Another," *Studies In 1,2, 3 John*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1987), p. 79.

⁵Gus Nichols, *The Bible Way* (July 1973).

⁶Errett, p. 451.

⁷E. M. Zerr, *Bible Commentary* (Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1955), p. 304.

VALUE OF FELLOWSHIP

H. A. “Buster” Dobbs



Buster Dobbs was born and reared in Houston, Texas. He was educated there, having studied at the University of Houston and South Texas College of Law. He is married to Martha DeWoody Dobbs, whose mother was a Starnes, from which family came a number of elders and preachers. Martha's father and grandfather served as elders. Buster and Martha have three children and eight grandchildren. His father, grandfather, and great-grandfather served as elders. His great- great grandfather was a Gospel preacher. His most important training came from godly parents.

He has spent his entire preaching years in Houston, having begun to preach at the age of fourteen. During his teenage years, he preached for the West End, South Houston and Fairbanks (later West 34th Street) churches in Houston. As a full time preacher, he preached eight years at Lyons and Majestic, seventeen years at Memorial, and the past fourteen years, as, first, preacher, then elder, and then preacher, again, at Fleetwood. At present, he is preaching, on a temporary basis, for the Klein Area church in Houston. Buster is a debater and writer. He is Editor of the *Firm Foundation* and is giving full time to speaking at lectureships, Gospel meetings, writing and working with congregations that have special needs (problems).

Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth, and hath not another to lift him up. Again, if two lie together, then they have warmth; but how can one be warm *alone*? And if a man prevail against him that is alone, two shall withstand him; and a threefold cord is not quickly broken (Ecc. 4:9-12).

When God first made man, He saw that it was not “good that the man should be alone.” Woman was created to be a companion to the man. The woman completes the man. They need each other. It is possible for an unmarried person to live a happy and fulfilled life, as many do and have, including Paul and Jesus. In most situations, the married have a special and greater blessing. If the marriage is what it ought to be—what God intended for it to be—what it has the potential of being—the joy and comfort derived by both partners in the union is wonderful. The ideal marriage is a companionship of the heart. All who have experienced the deep satisfaction of wedded bliss know the

value of such full fellowship. The Talmud says that a man without a companion is like a left hand without a right.

Many who have experienced the superior and beneficial good of an ideal marriage have waxed fluent and persuasive in lauding the fellowship of matrimonial harmony. None exceeds the simple statement of Solomon, "Whoso findeth a wife findeth a good thing, And obtaineth favor of Jehovah" (Pro. 18:22). Matrimonial bliss is a powerful demonstration of the value of fellowship. It cannot be overstated.

The support and encouragement of a close-knit family is an extension of marriage and its natural outcome. Children who live in the warmth of a loving family have many benefits. Those who are bereft of parental care may find a good and fulfilled life, but it will never have the advantages of the warmth and beauty of a full family. We cannot overvalue a good home. The fellowship of a natural family coming together to express their love for each other and share mutual woes is indescribably beautiful. A mother, father, and siblings who are devoted to each other in sacrificial affection give powerful evidence of priceless fellowship. All who understand the benefit of a good home know the value of sharing and caring.

Jesus taught the shocking truth that there is a relationship more valuable than a good marriage and a happy home. Early in His preaching career, the friends of Jesus, hearing of His marvelous works and astonishing teaching, decided He was "beside himself," and they went out to rescue him (Mark 3:21). Jewish scribes accused Him of casting out demons by the prince of demons (Mark 3:22). His mother and unbelieving brothers (John 7:5) found Him teaching a great multitude. They sent word to Him that they wanted to see Him. Jesus, having the ability to know what was in the mind even at a distance, may have understood they intended to take Him home and let Him rest. When Jesus was told that His family had come for Him:

he answereth them, and saith, Who is my mother and my brethren?
And looking round on them that sat round about him, he saith, Behold, my mother and my brethren! For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother (Mark 3:33-35).

Jesus puts a high premium upon doing the will of the Heavenly Father. He declares that the person who does the will of God is closer

to Him than His own dear mother Mary or His brothers: James, Joseph, Simon, and Judas. He was later to say:

He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that doth not take his cross and follow after me, is not worthy of me. He that findeth his life shall lose it; and he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it. He that receiveth you receiveth me, and he that receiveth me receiveth him that sent me (Mat. 10:37-40).

Jesus demands that we love Him more than we love our earthly families—mother, father, son, or daughter—and that we must follow Him regardless of what it cost. He places an inestimable value upon a right relationship with God, saying it is more precious than any natural tie.

The New Testament tells us that Jesus had a unique communion and intimacy with the Father.

At that season Jesus answered and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou didst hide these things from the wise and understanding, and didst reveal them unto babes: yea, Father, for so it was well-pleasing in thy sight. All things have been delivered unto me of my Father: and no one knoweth the Son, save the Father; neither doth any know the Father, save the Son, and he to whomsoever the Son willeth to reveal *him* (Mat. 11:25-27).

We come to the Father only through the Son. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life: no one cometh unto the Father, but by me" (John 14:6). He also said, "If a man love me, he will keep my word: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him" (John 14:23).

Obedient believers have communion with each other through Jesus. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light [that is, if we loyally obey the commands of sacred Scripture], we have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:7). The tie that binds us is respect for the authority of God and the sovereignty of the Bible, because such submission gives the obedient disciple a living hope. The imitators of Jesus have a common expectation of future association in a glory land. Jesus is the center of this unity and He calls upon believers to be bound together with the same strong cords of love that bind Jehovah, Jesus, and the Comforter in their solidarity. He expressed it this way:

Neither for these only do I pray, but for them also that believe on me through their word; that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us: that the world may

believe that thou didst send me. And the glory which thou hast given me I have given unto them; that they may be one, even as we *are* one; I in them, and thou in me, that they may be perfected into one; that the world may know that thou didst send me, and lovedst them, even as thou lovedst me (John 17:20-23).

It is not possible to imagine a more complete unity than the unity that exists between the only divine beings that comprise a single godhead. The essential unity of deity is undeniable. All of the followers of the Son of God are to be welded together in the same strong bonds as the eternal ties that hold in concord the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

The stunning fact is that Jesus Christ of Nazareth said that such fraternal union must be stronger and more valuable than even the cement of love that holds together father, mother, son, and daughter. Revolutionary teaching! Who can believe it? Who can practice it?

If my natural family is in Christ, then the teaching is not so dramatic. The physical bonds are fortified and enhanced by the spiritual cohesion. On the other hand, if my wife, mother, father, son, or daughter do not follow Christ, then I am to love my fellow disciples in Christ more than my human relatives? That is a hard saying—who can bear it?

The first grand lesson that flows from the teaching of Jesus about a closer union to those who obey God (than the alignment with members of our own earthly tribe) is the important and magnificent lesson of obedience. No point is more potently made in the Bible than the unmixed requirement that creatures owe perfect submission to the Creator. This teaching began in the story of Eden and continued until the last inspired writer laid down his pen. It is impossible to place too much emphasis on unfailing and entire compliance to the divine will.

It is shocking to those who know God-breathed Scripture to hear professing believers attempt to justify disobedience in any particular. Sophistry is always sophomoric. It is distressing to the saint for one who claims to be a follower of Jesus to justify and promote even a slight trace of disobedience. The constant teaching of the Bible is that the child of God must render uninterrupted compliance to the will of God.

The Bible says the proper relationship between the Creator and the creature is the relationship between a Master and the slave. Slavery

between man and man is hideous, but slavery between the "Origin" and the "Derived" is necessary and good.

Everyone is the slave of something. You cannot live in a vacuum. If you do not submit absolutely to God, then you will submit unquestionably to mammon. If you are the slave of mammon, but are purchased by deity, then you become the slave of deity. The New Testament puts it this way:

Know ye not, that to whom ye present yourselves *as* servants unto obedience, his servants ye are whom ye obey; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness? But thanks be to God, that, whereas ye were servants of sin, ye became obedient from the heart to that form of teaching whereunto ye were delivered; and being made free from sin, ye became servants of righteousness. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye presented your members *as* servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity, even so now present your members *as* servants to righteousness unto sanctification. For when ye were servants of sin, ye were free in regard of righteousness. What fruit then had ye at that time in the things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death. But now being made free from sin and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto sanctification, and the end eternal life. For the wages of sin is death; but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord (Rom. 6:16-23).

You are either the slave of Satan, or you are the slave of God. It is within your power to make the choice. If you elect to be the slave of God, then you are in company with all others who make that choice. If you decide to serve the devil, then you are his child and in his family.

Being a slave means the Master's will is your will. His wish is your command. Whatever He tells you to do is a rule you dare not break. Your ambition is to make your owner happy with your scrupulous obedience and untiring submission. The bond-servant does not quibble over big and little commands, but does all that is required of him—and more. "Even so ye also, when ye shall have done all the things that are commanded you, say, We are unprofitable servants; we have done that which it was our duty to do" (Luke 17:10).

The relationship between those who love and obey God supersedes all other relationships. The scenario runs like this: if it is your will to live for this life only, then you are aligned with all others whose highest ambition is mundane, but if your ambition is toward more excellent things, then your commitment is to all others who set their sights on glory.

Growing out of this spiritual brotherhood of faith are overt acts that proclaim the love the disciples have for one another. “A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another” (John 13:34-35). “Seeing ye have purified your souls in your obedience to the truth unto unfeigned love of the brethren, love one another from the heart fervently” (1 Pet. 1:22).

The Lord’s Supper is an act of fellowship. By partaking of the cup and the bread we are linked together in unity.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ? seeing that we, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we are all partake of the one bread (1 Cor. 10:16-17).

The Lord’s Supper is a communion with the Father, Jesus, the Spirit, **and** one another. The eating of the bread and drinking of the fruit of the vine is a time when our thoughts go back to a blood-stained cross, an empty tomb, and a promise to return. It is also a time when we think of our unbounded love for all other disciples of Jesus, especially those with whom we gather to break the bread, and we search our heart to purge any bitterness or resentment, making our love for one another complete. The weekly observance of the Lord’s memorial supper is a testimony to our fellowship.

Growing out of this deep commitment to each other—a commitment based on the love of God expressed in an unspeakable sacrifice and the response of an obedient faith—we rejoice to call nothing that we possess our own, but we distribute what we control to every other disciple according as any one may have need.

And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and soul: and not one *of them* said that aught of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common. And with great power gave the apostles their witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all. For neither was there among them any that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles’ feet: and distribution was made unto each, according as any one had need (Acts 4:32-35).

We should love and be willing to die for one another, just as Jesus loved us and died for us. “Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13).

The early disciples "continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers" (Acts 2:42). Continuing in the teaching of the apostles is another mark of the devout follower of the Son of God. It is also an evidence of fellowship. "But let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things" (Gal. 6:6). There is too much intolerance of plain, sober, instructive teaching from the pulpit, which is one of the sure signs of the lack of spiritual depth of this generation. Emotional displays, together with busy and fussy work, do not bring depth. Fellowship is necessarily connected with an advance in the apostles' doctrine. The more we know of Christ and His covenant, the stronger is our sense of brotherhood, and the greater our affection for things that are above where Christ is. One can be a brother only in something. Where there is no tie that binds us, we are not united but merely lined up. A strong pledge to doctrinal understanding and purity goes a long way in bringing us together in a wonderful phalanx. We must take care that the very thing that should cement us together does not shatter our fellowship.

There is also a negative side to the element of fellowship. Believers should not have fellowship with unbelievers. The solemn warning of Paul applies just here.

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:14-18).

For the same reason the apostles' doctrine should bind us together in deep devotion, error will drive us apart in dreadful division. Therefore, false teaching must not be allowed. The bane of this present day is a disposition to tolerate just about everything except intolerance. Much of the boasted union of modern religious groups is little more than agreeing to disagree; it is union based upon ignorance and unbelief.

When something is believed with the whole heart, it becomes unshakable conviction and cannot be compromised. If another strongly holds a contrary view, division is inevitable. This is what Paul meant when he wrote, “For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:19).

When Israel was about to enter the promised land, the people were repeatedly warned not to tolerate the abomination of heathen idols and to make no covenant with the Amorites. “Thou shalt make no covenant with them, nor with their gods. They shall not dwell in thy land, lest they make thee sin against me; for if thou serve their gods, it will surely be a snare unto thee” (Exo. 23:32-33). This point was so vital that it is repeated in Exodus 34:12; Numbers 16:26; and Deuteronomy 7:2-4; 12:30; 13:6-11.

This teaching was drummed into the ears of the people; still when they entered the land, it was not long until they made covenants with some of its inhabitants, and shortly after that they worshipped false gods. The complaint of prophets of God against the children of Abraham was that they inflamed themselves under the oaks and played the harlot with idolatry under every green tree and upon every high mountain.

The only cure was absolute abstinence from association with or indulgence in the company of the ungodly. What many call social virtues is commonly nothing more than the virtue of pigs in a litter. The redeemed are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose *them*” (Eph. 5:11). “If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth” (1 John 1:6).

The brotherhood that is in Christ is a beautiful thing to behold. It, like the value of a virtuous woman, is more valuable than rubies. When we have a bond that holds us together, we dedicate ourselves to the highest good of our fellow saint, being willing to make any sacrifice of goods or of self to secure the best interest of our sibling in Christ. We have a treasure that is superlative.

Behold, how good and how pleasant it is For brethren to dwell together in unity! It is like the precious oil upon the head, That ran down upon the beard, Even Aaron’s beard; That came down upon the skirt of his garments (Psa. 133:1-2).

Paul compares the essential unity of believers in Christ to the working of the human body.

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of the body, being many, are one body; so also *is* Christ. For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit. For the body is not one member, but many. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body; it is not therefore not of the body. And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body; it is not therefore not of the body. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling? But now hath God set the members each one of them in the body, even as it pleased him. And if they were all one member, where were the body? But now they are many members, but one body. And the eye cannot say to the hand, I have no need of thee: or again the head to the feet, I have no need of you. Nay, much rather, those members of the body which seem to be more feeble are necessary: and those *parts* of the body, which we think to be less honorable, upon these we bestow more abundant honor; and our uncomely *parts* have more abundant comeliness; whereas our comely *parts* have no need: but God tempered the body together, giving more abundant honor to that *part* which lacked; 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 suffereth, all the members suffer with it; or *one* member is honored, all the members rejoice with it (1 Cor. 12:12-26).

The accord and absolute singleness of those who are striving together for the faith of the gospel is glorious. It is in a common faith and purpose, which shows itself in an unashamed zeal to do its fellow traveler good and not harm. It is a willingness to die for one another.

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BASES OF FELLOWSHIP

Mark Bass



Mark Bass was born in Valdosta, Georgia, in 1957. His father, Herschel Bass, was also a gospel preacher. Mark began fill-in preaching at age 14 and full-time preaching at age 17. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and the University of Tennessee at Martin. Mark is married to the former Joanne Canup of Elkin, North Carolina, and they have two children, Michael and Bonnie.

Mark has worked with congregations in Tennessee, Kentucky, Illinois, and Ohio. He has been with the Alkire Road Church of Christ since January 1993. He has preached and conducted preacher training schools in India, the Caribbean, and the Ukraine.

I can think of no better way to begin our study than by defining *fellowship*. Of the Greek *koinonia*, Thayer says:

Fellowship, association...communion, joint participation...in the New Testament the share which one has in anything, participation...in the benefits of Christ's death, 1 Corinthians 10:16...in the...body of Christ or the church...the intimate bond of fellowship which unites Christians, etc.¹

It is a New Testament word not used until after the establishment of the Church. Inspiration uses this word some seventeen times throughout the New Testament. For ease of study, these passages are listed below.

And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers (Acts 2:42).

For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem (Rom. 15:26).

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the **fellowship** of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord (1 Cor. 1:9).

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the **communion** of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the **communion** of the body of Christ? (1 Cor. 10:16).

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what **fellowship** hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? (2 Cor. 6:14).

Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and *take upon us the fellowship* of the ministering to the saints (2 Cor. 8:4).

Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal **distribution** unto them, and unto all *men* (2 Cor. 9:13).

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the **communion** of the Holy Ghost, *be* with you all. Amen (2 Cor. 13:14).

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of **fellowship**; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision (Gal. 2:9).

For your **fellowship** in the gospel from the first day until now (Phi. 1:5).

If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any **fellowship** of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies (Phi. 2:1).

That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the **fellowship** of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death (Phi. 3:10).

That the **communication** of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus (Phm. 6).

But to do good and to **communicate** forget not: for with such sacrifices God is well pleased (Heb. 13:16).

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 (1 John 1:3).

If we say that we have **fellowship** with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth (1 John 1:6).

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 (1 John 1:7).

Many in the Lord's Church today simply do not understand the meaning of *fellowship*. Ask the average church member to define it, and (more often than not) the answer will have something to do with potlucks and social activities. Such ignorance would be amusing were it not so serious!

The subject of fellowship is one that has been neglected far too long in the Lord's church. Perhaps this lack of teaching has contributed to much of the error being propagated in regard to fellowship. As we look about our great brotherhood, we see extremes both to the right and to the left. On the one hand, there are those willing to fel-

lowship anyone and everyone who calls Jesus Lord. On the other extreme, there are those among us who will only fellowship those who look through the tinted glasses of anti-ism and agree with their opinions in matters of expediency. Both of these extremes are wrong and should be avoided. We need to be doing more preaching and teaching in regard to this very vital subject.

Consider with me some of the facets of Bible fellowship:

WHAT IS FELLOWSHIP BASED ON?

We can have fellowship today if and only if we build together upon Christ and His Word. Paul told the Corinthians, “For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11).

In 1 John 1:7 we find that fellowship is predicated upon walking in the light as He is in the light. Light is synonymous with truth, especially in the writings of John. In 1 John 1:7 he speaks of walking in the light, but in 2 John 6 we are told to “walk after his commandments,” while 3 John 3 instructs us to walk “in truth.” In stark contrast with walking in the light is walking “in darkness” (1 John 1:6; 2:11). This is the broad way which “leadeth to destruction” (Mat. 7:13). Those who follow this way have been blinded by the lies of Satan (2 Cor. 4:4; 11:13-15). We must not allow ourselves to be blinded by such if we are to be pleasing to our Heavenly Father.

There are some in the church today who would base fellowship solely on human sentiment and/or subjective reasoning. Granted, such will make for larger crowds and perhaps enhance our standing with the denominational world, but such reasoning will not hold up when weighed in the balance of God’s Word.

In Acts 2 we find that the early church “continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine [teaching—ASV] and fellowship” (Acts 2:42). Since the apostles taught only the doctrine of Christ, we can safely say that the early Christians continued steadfastly in the doctrine of Christ. Unless we stay with the doctrine of Christ there can be no Bible fellowship. Division usually occurs when men begin to tamper with (i.e., add to or take from) the Word of God.

WITH WHOM DO WE HAVE FELLOWSHIP?

Obviously, as children of God we have fellowship with our Heavenly Father. In 1 John 1:3 John writes, “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.” This passage also speaks of our fellowship with Jesus Christ. In 2 Corinthians 13:14 Paul speaks of “the communion of the Holy Spirit.” The word *communion* (KJV) comes from the same word usually translated “fellowship.” So the child of God has fellowship with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. The very idea of having fellowship with the Creator of the universe should cause us to bow our heads in humble gratitude!

As we have already seen, we can have fellowship today if and only if we build together upon Christ and His Word. This being the case, we are not at liberty to fellowship those following the doctrines or creeds of men. We are not even at liberty to fellowship those who follow most of the doctrines of Christ. However, we must always be careful to distinguish between doctrine and opinion.

Furthermore, we have fellowship with faithful brothers and sisters in Christ. Paul says, “God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). This does not mean that we will always see “eye-to-eye” on matters or that we will agree on every issue. This is not the meaning of fellowship.

WHAT ARE THE LIMITATIONS OF FELLOWSHIP?

The New Testament makes it very clear that our fellowship is limited. For example, we are to have no fellowship with Satan. As Paul instructed the Corinthians: “But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils” (1 Cor. 10:20). James tells his readers to “Resist the devil, and he will flee from you” (Jam. 4:7). Obviously we cannot fellowship the Devil literally, but we can fellowship his followers and his philosophy.

In 1 Corinthians 5 Paul clearly states that impenitent, immoral persons (fornicators, covetous people, idolaters, revilers, drunkards, and extortioners) are worthy of church discipline. Such individuals are to be delivered unto Satan (5:5), or “put away” (5:13) for their own soul’s sake (5:5) as well as for the protection of the church (5:6-7). Sadly, most brethren observe the “passover” when they come to these admonitions—they read them and then “pass over” to other things. Along this same line we are instructed to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11).

In 2 Corinthians Paul makes it clear that we are not to be in fellowship with unbelievers. “Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?” (2 Cor. 6:14). Does this mean that we can have no dealings at all with the unbelievers of this world? Of course not. The only way to do this would be to “go out of the world” as Paul said in 1 Corinthians 5:10. There is no way (short of monasticism) to avoid any and all contact with unbelievers. Obviously, if we are to be the “salt of the earth” (Mat. 5:13), we must have some contact with those in the world. (For salt to act as a preservative, it must come into contact with the meat.) However, we don’t have to make them our best friends; we don’t have to seek their companionship.

Fourth, we are not to be in fellowship with error according to 2 John 9-11. Inspiration instructs us to “mark them [turn away from—ASV] which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned” (Rom. 16:17). Titus 3:10 says that after a first and second admonition a *heretick* (factious man—ASV) is to be rejected. When Hymenaeus and Alexander made “shipwreck of the faith,” Paul delivered them unto Satan (i.e., disfellowship him—1 Cor. 5:5) that they might be taught “not to blaspheme.”

FALSE CONCEPTS OF FELLOWSHIP

In recent years, the idea has evolved that fellowship should be based on sentiment rather than sound doctrine. Some are advocating that as long as one accepts Jesus Christ as the Son of God and has been baptized (regardless of the reason), they are in full fellowship with us. Some naive brethren want to equate sincerity with truth. “But they are so honest and sincere!” we are told. Both of these ideas are totally opposed to plain biblical teachings. John makes it crystal clear that true fellowship is conditioned upon abiding “in the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9). The doctrine of Christ is the teachings of Christ (i.e., the New Testament). In verse 10 he goes on to say that if someone comes and does not bring this “doctrine” (teaching—ASV), he is not to be received into our homes (i.e., fellowshipped). Verse 11 stresses the importance of not fellowshipping those in error. “For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.” Notice, if we fellowship the false teacher, we are partakers in his evil deeds! Is it not amazing in light of this very clear warning that we have breth-

ren of prominence advocating the use of denominational preachers in our services in an effort to “close the gap” between us or to encourage fellowship between the two groups? This same principle applies to the use of false teachers within the church. When we invite known false teachers into our congregations to speak, we are telling others that we endorse that individual and his teachings. It is absurd to argue as some have, “He has agreed not to mention that while he is here.” Regardless of whether he brings his false doctrine out into the open or keeps it to himself, it is often common knowledge that he espouses such error. Those who know it will assume that we endorse the error when we fellowship and use these men. As Wayne Jackson observed:

If schools and churches would cease to use men, who are openly known to advocate radical ideas, in gospel meetings, lectureship programs, etc., some of them would soon get the idea! A preacher with no audience is a rather impotent creature.²

Alan Highers succinctly stated:

In recent years a “fellowship movement” has begun among certain brethren for the avowed purpose of bringing all segments of the Restoration Movement, and perhaps some others, to unity. The design of this movement, however, is not to resolve differences or to call men back to the Bible, but rather to have “unity in diversity,” that is, unity in spite of all the differences that may exist between us.³

In the intervening years this attempt at “unity in diversity” has gained momentum among many brethren. They are willing to “overlook” things such as instrumental music, women preachers, and a host of other things in an effort to fellowship those in the denominational world. When all is said and done, they may have union, but not unity. Sadly, those who speak out in opposition to such compromises are castigated and called all sorts of unpleasant names.

On the other hand there are those who think that we cannot have fellowship with one another unless we agree on every issue. We need to realize that not every issue is a matter of doctrine, or as one ol’ brother put it, “a heaven or hell issue.” For example, faithful brethren have disagreed for years over the indwelling of the Holy Spirit (i.e., only through the Word or by other means). Brethren Gus Nichols and Guy N. Woods discussed this issue at the Freed-Hardeman Lectures time and time again. They disagreed, but they were still in fellowship with one another. Other examples could be given about which we must not sever fellowship. Obviously there are many issues about

which there is no room for disagreement (i.e., the purpose of baptism, instrumental music, women preachers, etc.). We cannot and we must not fellowship those teaching error on these positions (and others that could be mentioned).

In other words, we must be careful not to extend the right hand of fellowship to those not in fellowship with God.

CONCLUSION

Once again, we ask: “What is Christian fellowship?” It is that spiritual partnership that links together all who have been baptized into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, into a great fellowship or brotherhood in Jesus Christ.

Our fellowship must be no broader than God’s fellowship, nor should it be any narrower. May God give us the wisdom to study this vital subject as well as the courage and fortitude to follow His Divine precepts in practice.

ENDNOTES

¹Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer’s Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.), pp. 351-352.

²Wayne Jackson, “Limitations of Fellowship,” *Christian Courier*, September 1983, p. 20.

³Alan Highers, “The Fellowship Question,” *Gospel Advocate*, January 10, 1974, p. 26.

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OBLIGATIONS OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Stanley Ryan



Stanley Ryan was born July 12, 1954, in Oneonta, Alabama. He attended Walker College, University of Alabama, Memphis School of Preaching and Southern Christian University. In 1974, he married Pattie Thompson and they have three children: Beth, Sarah and Caleb.

He has done local work in Mississippi, Alabama, and Florida. Stanley currently is working with Columbiana Church of Christ in Columbiana, Alabama.

INTRODUCTION

Christian fellowship is a cherished privilege and carries weighty obligations toward God and among brethren. Webster says the word obligation means: “1: The action of obligating oneself to a course of action (as by a promise or vow) 2a: something that obligates one to a course of action b: a debt security.... 4: something one is bound to do: duty, responsibility.” As Christians we enter a covenant relationship with God to pursue a course of action to be Christ-like. The word *fellow* means partnership, comrade, associate, equal in rank, power, and character. Thus, the obligations of Christian fellowship requires cooperation with others in doing the will of God.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Christian fellowship must be seen as biblical fellowship. It must be based upon our submission to and continued obedience to the Word of God. Christian fellowship must indicate our understanding of the close interactive ties and association that we have in God’s family as His children cooperating with one another to bring glory to our heavenly Father.

Those who shallowly see fellowship as potluck dinners, parties, coke and cookies, showers, wedding receptions, ball games, parents’ night out, or other wholesome forms of recreation or entertainment

have not comprehended the spiritual significance of Christian fellowship. Biblical fellowship is not founded on meat or drinks, fun or recreation, but upon a unity that is based upon a common truth producing a common faith, communion, hope, and identification with other servants of Jesus Christ.

CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP IS VERTICAL AND HORIZONTAL

The great and faithful apostle John declares the shared nature of Christian fellowship is both vertical and horizontal. Horizontal: “that ye also may have fellowship with us” (apostles and faithful brethren—1 John 1:3). Vertical: “and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ” (the Godhead). This fellowship between man and God is dependent on a vertical connection: “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 [keeps on cleansing] us from all sin” (1 John 1:7). When one walks in darkness, there is no fellowship with God, nor can there be Christian fellowship (Eph. 5:11). When one walks in the light, there is fellowship with God and thus fellowship with others walking in the light. Walking in the light, being in Christ, establishes the area of spiritual, biblical, Christian fellowship. Walking in the light also determines the extent of true fellowship with the brethren and with the Godhead. If we do not have fellowship with God (vertical), we cannot have fellowship with others (horizontal).

There can be fellowship between men which is horizontal alone without any consideration of God’s will. This type of fellowship is not biblical Christian fellowship. This fellowship corrupts the truth of God’s Word which is the source of life. When man willfully (intentionally or unintentionally) excludes, perverts, or corrupts the Scriptures, it causes continued unbelief. This form of fellowship may have a false religious application such as denominationalism, interdenominational, or nondenominational. It would apply to Promise Keepers, A. A., Unity-in-diversity, Anti-ism, Liberalism, Humanism, Evolution, etc. Human fellowship and association does not constitute Christian fellowship! Paul warned the Ephesians, “And have no fellowship [*sugkoinoneo*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph.5:11). Just as electricity has a positive and a negative, so does the doctrine of fellowship.

In true Christian fellowship we become fellow partakers or partners (*metoche*) in the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16). We become partakers of the “heavenly calling” (Heb. 3:1) pressing on “stedfast unto the end” (Heb. 3:14). We enjoy spiritual enlightenment by the good Word of God and are made partakers of the blessings of the Holy Ghost (Heb. 6:4). As God’s children we become partakers of God’s chastisement for He “scourgeth every son whom he receiveth” (Heb. 12:6-8).

Christian fellowship and unity go together (1 Cor. 1:10; Eph. 4:1-3). Biblical fellowship makes the unity of believers an obligation that is neither optional nor negotiable. It is sinful to cause division (Rom. 16:17), to be disorderly (2 The. 3:6), or to be the source of discord (Pro. 6:16-19). Those who fail to continue in the light because of immorality (1 Cor. 5), doctrinal error (Rom. 16:17), or disorderly conduct (2 The. 3:6) are to be restored (Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:19-20). If they refuse to repent, then we are obligated to “withdraw fellowship” from them because they are no longer in God’s fellowship nor in the fellowship of those who continue to walk in the light (for sin puts one in darkness). When sin separates one from God (Isa. 59:1-2), it also separates one from those faithfully serving God. Fellowship can be broken by sin, just as an electrical circuit can be broken by a loose connection or a broken wire. When the error is recognized, it can be repaired by restoration of the circuit. Our fellowship is maintained as we continue to be connected with God and with His servants (1 John 1:5-10). We are obligated to seek Christian fellowship and to maintain biblical fellowship personally and collectively.

THE DEFINITION OBLIGATES EACH OF US

We must properly define a word to understand its meaning and application. The Greek word *koinonia* has been translated as “fellowship, contribution, communion, distribution, communication, and communicate” in the King James Version.

Greek scholars like Thayer defines *koinonia* as “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse;...the share which one has in anything, participation;...used of the intimate bond of fellowship which unites Christians;...of the fellowship of Christians with God and Christ.”¹

Bagster says it means: “a fellow, partner...a sharer, partaker...to have in common, share...to be associated in, to become a sharer in,...to

associate one's self with by sympathy and assistance, to communicate with in the way of aid and relief..."²

W. E. Vines defines it as, "communion, fellowship, sharing in common, ...communication;...that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution,...to have fellowship with or in."³

Marvin R. Vincent commenting on the *fellowship* in Acts 2:42 writes,

from *koinos*, common. A relation between individuals, which involves a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other. The word answers to the Latin *cummunio*, from *communis*, common. Hence, sometimes rendered communion, as 1 Cor. x.16; 2 Cor. xiii.14. Fellowship is the most common rendering. Thus, Philip. i.5: "your fellowship in the gospel," signifying co-operation in the widest sense; participation in sympathy, suffering and labor.⁴

Guy N. Woods in commenting on 1 John 1:3 writes,

Fellowship (*koinonia*) is partnership, joint sharing. Through the acceptance of the Word of life a unity of faith, practice, and worship is established, and it was for this purpose that the life was being declared. It is possible to have fellowship only when there is a common bond established in faith, work, and love.⁵

Our fellowship must be rooted in the gospel principles of faith, work, and love rather than worldly recreation, carnal entertainment, fun and food, family and friends, clicks and clout, personalities and power.

WE ARE OBLIGATED AS BRANCHES

Jesus illustrates the essential nature of fellowship in John 15:5-7:

I am the vine, ye *are* the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing. If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered; and men gather them, and cast *them* into the fire, and they are burned. If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

The individual's fellowship with Christ is essential to receiving the life-giving properties necessary to proper growth and fruit bearing. All branches (individuals) who abide in Christ not only continue to grow but produce fruit which glorifies the Vine. Every individual needs Christ, for without Christ we can do nothing.

Brother Guy N. Woods wrote, "To abide in Christ is not only to be in His spiritual body—the Church—but is to live in close communion

and fellowship with Him.”⁶ Every branch is obligated to abide in Christ or be cut off for fruitlessness, non co-operation, and faithlessness which is apostasy.

WE ARE OBLIGATED AS MEMBERS OF THE BODY

Paul teaches that every member is useful and needed (1 Cor. 12:13-27). The church is the body of Christ; His disciples are members of the body (1 Cor. 12:12-26; Eph. 1:19-23). Just as the branches owe their life to the vine and cannot survive apart from it, neither can the members of the body survive if separated from the body. If one is separated from the body, they are separated from the head of the body, Christ (Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 5:23-25; 2 John 6-11). One severs fellowship with the body just as one severs fellowship with God, by refusing to repent of sin (Isa. 59:1-2; Heb. 10:26; 2 John 9; 2 Pet. 1:20-21). One can be separated from the body when the church recognizes impenitence and practices corrective discipline resulting in the withdrawal of fellowship for:

1. Refusing to repent of private personal offenses against a brother who practices Matthew 18:15-18.
2. False teachers, those who cause “division and offences contrary to the doctrine” (Rom. 16:17) and who refuse to abide in the doctrine of Christ (2 John 9).
3. Those who are guilty of immorality and are practicing the “works of the flesh,” such as fornication, adultery, homosexuality, etc. (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 5:19-21; Rom. 1:24-32).
4. Those who “walk disorderly” not following the commandments and righteous examples of the apostles (2 The. 2:7-15).
5. Those who would bid “God speed” to false teachers (2 John 10-11) instead of rebuking them.

We cannot allow sin as a cancerous agent to destroy the body of Christ. Surgery can often remove the corrupted part and spare the rest of the body. Treatment of severe spiritual disease is often traumatic, but, like “chemotherapy,” is sometimes the only hope to bring about remission. Let us practice preventive medicine, get regular spiritual check-ups, exercise our spiritual muscles actively, and look to the “great physician” in our time of need.

Brethren, the body of Christ is commanded, and thus is obligated, not to have fellowship with “the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). The faithful must continue to be

separate from the unrighteous (2 Cor. 6:14-18). We must “mark” the false teachers (Rom. 16:17). We must abstain from the “appearance of evil” and be “the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 The. 5:22; 1 Tim. 3:15). Every member needs the fellowship, the love, compassion, support, care, strength, and encouragement found in the body of Christ.

OBLIGATIONS AS GOD’S CHILDREN

We are brothers and sisters in the family of God having been “born again” (John 3:3-5; 1 Pet. 1:22-23). We have a special fellowship with our Heavenly Father, “Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God:...Beloved, now are we the sons of God” (1 John 3:1-2). Just as our physical family requires obedience and submission to our parents and cooperation with other family members (Eph. 6:1-4), so our spiritual family obligates us to do our part. We must: (1) Love God and one another (Mat. 22:37-38); (2) We must care for and be our “brothers keepers” (Rom. 12:5; 1 Cor. 12:25; Eph. 4:29-32; Gal. 6:2); (3) We must be faithful to the Father’s will to receive our inheritance (Rom. 8:17).

Those who rebel against the Father’s will can be disinherited (Num. 14:12; 2 Pet. 2:20-21). Those who apostatize along the way will have their names blotted out of the book of life (Rev. 3:5; 22:19). However, our loving father patiently awaits to forgive the penitent prodigal (Luke 15). As spiritual caring brethren, we are to seek to restore brethren “overtaken in a fault” (Gal. 6:1). We are to convert brothers who “err from the faith” (Jam. 5:19-20). We are to discipline a family member who refuses to correct personal trespasses against the family (Mat. 18:15-18). Restoration to fellowship is based upon confessing the sin and penitently and prayerfully seeking the forgiveness of God and the brethren (1 John 1:7-9; Jam. 5:16-20; Acts 8:22-24). God’s family can enjoy a loving, caring relationship here and be prepared for that reunion in Heaven.

As God’s faithful children we are fellowheirs (Eph. 3:6; Rom. 8:17), with all the blessings and privileges of God’s estate. We are the heirs of God’s grace (Rom. 5:1-2; Tit. 2:11-12; Eph. 2:8-9; Heb. 4:16). We are the heirs of salvation (2 Tim. 2:10; Heb. 1:14). We are the heirs of God’s promises (Gal. 3:29; Heb. 6:17; 2 Pet. 3:9). We are the heirs of the Kingdom (Jam. 2:5; Mat. 5:10; Rev. 1:9). We are the

heirs of eternal life (Tit. 3:7). The apostle Peter tells us of our inheritance, “To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,...Receiving the end of your faith, *even* the salvation of *your* souls” (1 Pet. 1:4, 9). John says, “This is the promise that he hath promised us, *even* eternal life” (1 John 2:25; John 3:16). As the heirs of God, our names are recorded in the family register: “Your names are written in heaven” (Luke 10:20). Paul says our names are in “the book of life” (Phi. 4:3). The Hebrews writer applies this to faithful church members: “To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven” (Heb. 12:23). There are great blessings to those who overcome sin: “Blessed *are* they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city” (Rev. 22:14; 3:4-5). John revealed, “He that overcometh shall inherit all things; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son” (Rev. 21:7). Therefore, we are obligated to be faithful to our spiritual family relationship or forfeit our inheritance.

WE ARE OBLIGATED AS FELLOW LABOURERS

Every worker must do his part and carry his load to fulfill the Master’s will. Paul called Philemon “our beloved and fellow-worker” (Phi. 1:1). In fact, all that have been called “out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9; Col. 1:13) are called “fellowlabourers” (Phi. 4:3) and “fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God” (Col. 4:11). Members of the body of Christ are God’s “workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works” (Eph. 2:10). Every member is to strive together for the unity of the faith, being responsible for his/her stewardship (Eph. 4:1; Luke 12:42-43)—the use of our talent or money (Mat. 25:14-30), time (Col. 4:5), service (Luke 9:23; Col. 3:24), and our body (Rom. 12:1-2). Every individual is accountable unto God (Rom. 14:12). The wise man Solomon tells us, “God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil” (Ecc. 12:14). Therefore, every member must be actively involved in the Father’s business of teaching the lost (Mat. 28:18-20). Paul encouraged the Corinthians with the words of the prophet: “I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak” (2 Cor. 4:13). Early Christians were encouraged to be ready unto every good work, which involved evangelism (Acts 8:4), benevolence (Acts 6; 11:29-30; 2 Cor. 8:10-14), and the edifying

(building up) of the body of Christ: “Let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works” (Heb. 10:24). When we bear one another’s burdens, we fulfill the law of Christ (Gal. 6:2). Because members are obligated to do God’s work, we must labor together to accomplish God’s will. Are you doing your part?

WE ARE FELLOW SERVANTS

The apostle Paul refers to Epaphras as “our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ” (Col. 1:7) and calls Tychicus a “fellowservant in the Lord” (Col. 4:7). Vine says that fellowservant (*sundoulos*) means “servants of the same Divine Lord.”⁷ The ministry of the Word is a work of service that every believer is called to participate in (Acts 8:4). Jesus said, “The harvest truly is plenteous, but the labourers *are* few; Pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that he will send forth labourers into his harvest” (Mat. 9:37-38). The church is to train faithful men in the Word of God: “The same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also” (2 Tim. 2:2).

Elders are expected to be workers overseeing, leading, feeding, protecting, teaching, and shepherding the flock. Paul wrote, “If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work” (1 Tim. 3:1). Deacons are to be proven servants qualified to serve under the eldership in the work of Christ, “And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being *found* blameless” (1 Tim. 3:10). Every member of the body of Christ has an obligation to be a fellow servant cooperating in the building up of the body of Christ, “Well done, *thou* good and faithful servant” (Mat. 25:21).

Every member must meet and retain certain qualities to be “qualified” to scripturally fulfill the role of a fellow servant. Are you scripturally qualified to be a servant of Christ?

SCRIPTURAL ELDERS AND SCRIPTURAL CHURCH MEMBERS

A qualified elder is no holier in God’s revelation than a qualified Christian. Let every member “Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith” (2 Cor.13:5).

Qualification for Elders

1. Desire, 1 Tim. 3:1
2. Blameless, 1 Tim. 3:2
3. Husband of one wife, 1 Tim. 3:2
4. Vigilant, 1 Tim. 3:2
5. Sober, 1 Tim. 3:2; Tit. 1:8
6. Good behaviour, 1 Tim. 3:2
7. Given to hospitality, 1 Tim. 3:2
8. Apt to teach, 1 Tim. 3:2
9. Not given to wine, 1 Tim. 3:3
10. No striker, 1 Tim. 3:3
11. Not greedy of filthy lucre, 1 Tim. 3:3
12. Patient, 1 Tim. 3:3
13. Not a brawler, 1 Tim. 3:3
14. Not covetous, 1 Tim. 3:3
15. Rule well own house, 1 Tim. 3:4
16. Children in subjection, 1 Tim. 3:4
17. Not a novice, 1 Tim. 3:6
18. A good report, 1 Tim. 3:7
19. Faithful children, Tit. 1:6
20. Not self willed, 1 Tim. 3:7
21. Self controlled, Tit. 1:8
22. Just, Tit. 1:8
23. Not soon angry, Tit. 1:7
24. Lover of good, Tit. 1:8
25. Willing, 1 Pet.5:2; 1 Tim. 6:18
26. Not for prominence, 1 Pet.5:2-3
27. Must be proven, 1 Tim. 3:10

Qualification for Church Members

1. Wills, Luke 9:23; Rev. 22:17; own selves 2 Cor. 13:5
2. Blameless, Phi. 2:15; 1 Cor. 1:8
3. Have own wife, 1 Cor. 7:2*
4. Watch, 1 Cor. 16:13
5. Sober, 1 The. 5:8
6. Good, 1 The. 5:15
7. Hospitality, Rom. 12:13
8. Able to teach, Heb. 5:12-14
9. Not drunken with wine, Eph. 5:18
10. Must not strive, 2 Tim. 2:24
11. Not love money, 1 Tim. 6:10
12. Patient, Jam. 5: 8
13. Not a brawler, Tit. 3:2
14. Not covetous, Eph. 5:3
15. Husband head of wife, Eph. 5:22*
16. Raise up children, Eph. 6:4*
17. Grow, 2 Pet. 3:18
18. Righteous, Tit. 2:12
19. Raise up, Eph. 6:4*
20. Submit to others, Eph. 5:21
21. Self controlled, 1 Cor. 9:25
22. Righteous, Rom. 1:17
23. Put away anger, Col. 3:8
24. Hold fast that which is good, 1 The. 5:21
25. Willing to communicate, 1 Tim. 6:18
26. Not to be see of men, Mat. 6:1
27. Prove your own selves, 2 Cor. 13:5

*All church members are not required to be married or to have children; these are conditional. ARE YOU QUALIFIED TO BE A CHURCH MEMBER?

OBLIGATIONS AS FELLOW PRISONERS

Jesus foretold our persecution (Mat. 5:10-12) and our obligation to be faithful unto death (Rev. 2:10). Christians were forewarned about persecution, difficulties, and hardships they would face for the cause of Christ (1 Pet. 4:12-19). Paul proclaimed that “all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:12). Paul refers to “Aristarchus my fellowprisoner” (Col. 4:10). Many in the first century were arrested because they “preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead” (Acts 4:2). Peter says, “*if any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf” (1 Pet. 4:16).

The apostle Paul exhorted Christians to trust in the Lord as he had done: “Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me...Lystra; what persecutions I endured: but out of *them* all the Lord delivered me. Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution” (2 Tim. 3:11-12).

The great persecution against the church in Jerusalem resulting in the brethren leaving and they “scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria” (Acts 8:1). This resulted in the evangelism of those regions and the spreading of the Word (Acts 8:4). Some went as far as Damascus (120 miles north) where Saul followed to arrest and bring them back to Jerusalem for trial. Later Paul would be arrested, imprisoned at Caesarea (Acts 23:33) and transported to Rome where he was under house arrest for “two whole years” (Acts 28:30) for his appeal before Caesar. The apostle John would be exiled to the island of Patmos (Rev. 1:9) “for the word of God.”

Many gave their lives for the truth: like Stephen (Acts 7) and James (Acts 12). These examples should remind us that, as Jesus was arrested and crucified to save us from our sins, we ought to live faithfully, serving our Lord so others can also be saved even if it cost us our lives (Rev. 2:10).

Paul wrote several epistles while imprisoned. Let us read these to learn truths that will strengthen our faith and create the courage to endure hardship and be faithful unto death. Though we may not be personally locked up or physically persecuted, our brethren have been.

WE ARE OBLIGATED AS FELLOW PRIEST

The Greek word *hierateuma* “denotes ‘a priesthood,’ ‘a body of priests,’ consisting of all believers, the whole Church (not a special order from among them), called ‘a holy priesthood,’ (1 Pet. 2:5); ‘a royal priesthood,’ verse 9”⁸ The work of priest is to offer spiritual sacrifices (Rom. 12:1-2; Phi. 2:17; 4:18; Heb. 13:15-16; 1 Pet. 2:9).

Every priest is obligated to submit to and to cooperate with all other priests looking to Jesus as the High Priest. One of the great lessons in the book of Hebrews is the superiority of Christ’s High Priesthood as being from an order different and higher than the Aaronic. His is greater in that He is the Son of God (Heb. 7:28) with a priesthood of the Melchisedec order. Jesus is spoken of as “an high priest” (Heb. 4:15; 5:5, 10; 6:20; 7:26; 8:1-3; 9:11), “a great high priest” (Heb. 4:14), “a great priest” (Heb. 10:21), “a merciful and faithful high priest” (Heb. 2:17), “the Apostle and High Priest of our profession” (Heb. 3:1), and “a high priest after the order of Melchisedec” (Heb. 5:10). The change in priesthood brought a change in the law (Heb. 7:12).

As priests, we “tarry one for another” when we come together in communion (1 Cor. 11:33). As priests, we offer the praise of our lips by “teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). As priests, we offer prayer to the Heavenly Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ (Mat. 6:9; 1 Tim. 2:5; John 14:13). As priests, we worship in “spirit and in truth” (John 4:24), we “live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world” (Tit. 2:12), and we “shine as lights in the world” (Phi. 2:15). Let us all cooperate in the sacrificial praise offered in life and worship to exalt our glorious God.

WE ARE OBLIGATED AS FELLOW CITIZENS

The apostle Paul refers to Christians as fellow-citizens (*sumpolites*), “possessing the same citizenship (Eph. 2:19) used metaphorically in a spiritual sense.”⁹ Every faithful believer has citizenship rights now and the hope of heaven in the hereafter. “For our conversation [citizenship] is in heaven” (Phi. 3:20). The life we live and our everyday conduct should be characteristic of our heavenly citizenship (Phi. 1:27).

Paul's Roman citizenship availed throughout the Roman Empire, and (besides private rights) it also included: (1) exemption from all degrading punishment (Acts 22:24-29), (2) a right to appeal to the Emperor after a sentence (Acts 26:32), and (3) a right to go to Rome for trial before the Emperor if charged with a capital offense (Acts 27:1).

As Christians, our heavenly citizenship brings us blessings now and in the world to come everlasting life (Mark 10:29-30). Jesus stated that in His Father's house are many mansions, and He has gone to prepare us a place (John 14:1-3). As God's children, our inheritance is "incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven" (1 Pet.1:4). When temptations come, God provides a way of escape (1 Cor. 10:13). If we sin, "we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous" (1 John 2:1). When we are burdened, Gods' grace is sufficient to sustain us (2 Cor. 12:9; Heb. 4:16; 12:28).

Along with Abraham we look "for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10). We look for a "better *country*, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city" (Heb. 11:16). In that city, no sin shall enter (Rev. 21). The inhabitants who have citizenship in heaven have their names "written in the Lamb's book of life" (Rev. 21:27). They have been washed in the blood of the Lamb (Rev. 1:5) and shall walk with Jesus in white, for they are worthy (Rev. 3:4). Let us all make our calling and election sure (2 Pet. 1:10).

Today, when brethren fail to accept the obligations of Christian fellowship the results are: (1) sins of omission and commission, (2) lukewarmness, (3) indifference, (4) compromise, (5) unbelief, (6) worldliness, (7) spiritual death, (8) apostasy, (9) leaving one's first love, (10) backsliding, (11) loss of fellowship, and (12) eternal punishment. As the salt of the Earth, we must let our influence be "salty" (Mat. 5:13). As the light of the world, we are obligated to "shine" (Mat. 5:14-16) that God might receive the glory. As brethren, we are to love, exhort, provoke, and encourage one another in Christian fellowship. As servants of God, we are to serve faithfully and to evangelize the lost. As soldiers, we are to fight the good fight of faith. Our fellowship in Christ is awesome in obligations and in blessings.

May God bless you in His fellowship!

ENDNOTES

¹Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.), p. 352.

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³W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (McLean, VA: MacDonald Publishing Company, n.d.), p. 430.

⁴Marvin R. Vincent, *Word Studies in the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1973), 1:456-457.

⁵Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles of Peter, John, and Jude* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1973), p. 213.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁷Vine, p. 348.

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RIGHT ATTITUDES AND FELLOWSHIP

Kent Bailey



Kent Baily was born in 1952 at Hamilton, Ohio. For the past 22 years he has served as local evangelist with congregations in Indiana, Kentucky, and Tennessee, having completed 15 years work with the church of Christ in Lenoir City, Tennessee. Kent writes for various brotherhood publications and speaks on numerous gospel meetings and lectureships each year throughout the states.

During the past several years Kent has participated as the regular speaker on *Searching The Scriptures* and *The Bible Speaks* radio broadcasts and presently serves as one of the regular speakers on *What Does The Bible Say* TV broadcast sponsored by the Southwest Church of Christ in Jackson, Mississippi.

Kent is a graduate of Louisville Bible College (B.A) and Tennessee Bible College (M.A.). He has received additional education from the Law Enforcement Satellite Academy of Tennessee, the FBI Law Enforcement Training School, and the National Institute of Justice, serving as a Sergeant with the Lenoir City Police Department Reserve Unit.

Kent is married to the former Judy Whitehouse, and they have one daughter, Merideth.

The concepts of both a right attitude and consistent application of the principles of biblical fellowship are indeed essential components of New Testament Christianity. The need for this particular study is therefore crucial to the personal application of the Scriptures to our own lives.

By the term *fellowship* we refer to a joint sharing, participation, communion, association or contribution.¹ The Bible is quite clear as to whom we may extend fellowship and those from whom we must refuse to fellowship. Both within and without of the church of the Lord there is a great amount of misunderstanding regarding that of biblical fellowship.

One writer relates an interesting story regarding the concept of biblical fellowship:

The lives of great men remind us of the danger of fellowshiping error. In 1967 it was my privilege to hear Henry S. Ficklin, an aged disciple from Mt. Sterling, Kentucky, speak about J. W. McGarvey.

Brother Ficklin studied at the feet of McGarvey prior to his death in 1911. This talk was especially interesting to me as I have studied the life of McGarvey a good bit. McGarvey was a great man, a capable teacher of the word, a careful scholar and writer. But like those among whom he lived, he had faults.

In the 19th century when the church was divided over the use of instrumental music and the missionary society, McGarvey took what might be described as a “middle of the road” position. Even though he opposed the organ and moved his membership when the Broadway Church, Lexington, Kentucky adopted the organ by majority vote, he continued to fraternize with those who used it. What about his students whom he had taught that the instrument was wrong? Did they follow his scriptural advice? No! Brother Ficklin commented that McGarvey’s influence went with fellowship, not with his teaching.²

As we note the importance of biblical fellowship, may we strive to be consistent in application of God’s truth to our own lives! This writer has personally known elders, preachers, and other Christians, who speak out against false teachers as well as false doctrine, yet continue to persist in being in fellowship with such.

When we consider the fact of biblical fellowship, we note that the Scriptures teach that such is accomplished exclusively through Jesus Christ (John 14:6). It is thus only through Christ that we speak about spiritual fellowship among humanity. This fellowship with both the Father and the Son is indeed manifested by Christ through His gospel. The apostle John expressed it in this particular manner: “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” (1 John 1:3).

The gospel is proclaimed in order that men may come into the fellowship of God and Christ. The consequence of being in fellowship with God means that we must continue to follow the teachings of Christ: “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” (1 John 1:6-7).

Fellowship with humanity can never be scripturally attained unless and until we are in fellowship with God in Christ. This spiritual fellowship is first vertical, looking up to God; then horizontal looking out to other Christians.

As we note the teaching of the Scriptures, the concept of personal attitude is essentially linked to our fellowship with God and those of His faithful children. By the term **attitude** we refer to a disposition and/or state of mind. A scriptural concept of fellowship necessitates a right attitude toward God, truth, and our fellow man. Such also necessitates consistency on our part, in respecting the basis and limits of biblical fellowship.

BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP NECESSITATES A RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD GOD

Those in fellowship with God possess a correct disposition and/or state of mind toward Him. Our Lord stated:

Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets (Mat. 22:36-40).

The biblical love as stated in this particular passage and elsewhere is not a warm tender emotion, but rather, that of a willingness to sacrifice in the accomplishment of good.

The love that prompts the right attitude toward God is that of a reciprocal love. It will return that which is given (John 3:16; 1 John 2:3-5). Such a love does not count the cost of obedience, but rather is submissive to the Lord's requirements regardless of the cost.

For every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things *pertaining* to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins: Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity. And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as *was* Aaron. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. As he saith also in another *place*, Thou *art* a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared; Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him (Heb. 5:1-9).

The love that prompts the right attitude toward God is a love that demands a holy hate. Before one can be capable of producing a holy

love, one must first hate those elements that the Lord hates. “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:104). “Therefore I esteem all *thy* precepts *concerning* all *things to be* right; *and* I hate every false way” (Psa. 119:128). One cannot be in fellowship with the Lord while at the same time be involved in fellowship with those elements which the Lord hates (Eph. 5:1-11).

BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP NECESSITATES A RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARDS TRUTH

John 17 is a record of the prayer of Christ for the unity of His people. As an essential component of this prayer, we note the statement: “Sanctify them through thy truth: thy word is truth” (John 17:17). Fellowship is therefore contingent upon God’s truth and our proper response to it.

The Apostle John stated: “I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father” (2 John 4).

Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth (3 John 2-4).

Because of the nature of truth, i.e., it is attainable, knowable, and objective (John 8:32); one must be set for the defense of such and earnestly contend for it (Phi. 1:17; Jude 3). To be a compromiser of truth places one under the condemnation of the wrath of God as well as misleading the lost souls of those who follow Him (Mat. 15:13-14; Rom. 16:17-18).

The case being that fellowship is joint participation and association necessitates that we recognize the importance of identifying our fellowship exclusively with those who teach only the truth. The apostle John noted:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Noted liberals of earlier years, such as W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett have denied that **the doctrine of Christ** in this passage applies to the totality of New Testament truth. They falsely allege that such speaks with reference to the incarnation of Christ only. During the last several years false teachers, such as Rubel Shelly, Jeff Walling, Max Lucado, Marvin Phillips, Joe Beam, and others, advocate this same false doctrine. A careful analysis of the text, however, proves otherwise.

The question on 2 John 9 is whether the expression **doctrine of Christ** is to be understood as being subjective genitive, or objective genitive in the grammatical construction of the Greek text. In noting the grammar of the sentence, it could be either. Therefore, we must note the contextual usage and comparative studies of additional New Testament texts. The subjective genitive points to the doctrine which Christ taught, whereas the objective genitive points to the doctrine about Christ.

False teachers assert that the context according to verse 7 requires the objective genitive, i.e., the doctrine about Christ. They allege that particular thought is under consideration due to the fact that verse 7 points to those who denied that Jesus was incarnate (i.e., He came in the flesh). **The doctrine of Christ** in verse 9, they falsely conclude, is limited to the incarnation of Christ. By so limiting the application of this passage, those of the New Hermeneutic persuasion seek to promote an open fellowship, bringing in all types of sin and unauthorized practices into the church. However, it is interesting to note that the view promoting the objective genitive concept goes against the scholarship of the academic world!

Greek grammarians and critical commentators deny that the objective genitive is under consideration because of the total context of all the verses in the passage; they affirm that the subjective genitive, i.e., **the doctrine taught by Christ** is that which is under consideration in 2 John 9. **A. T. Robertson, John R. W. Stott, Simon Kistemaker, B. F. Wescott, Henry Alford, A. E. Brooks and J. H. Thayer** all have material in their respective works affirming such. One does not need to understand Koine Greek to understand the truth about **the doctrine of Christ** in 2 John 9. Note the context:

1. John speaks of “**the truth**” (2 John 1-4).
2. John speaks of “**the commandments**” (2 John 6).

3. John follows then with reference to “**doctrine**” (2 John 9).

Proper respect for the context of the passage under consideration necessitates that we recognize the “truth,” “commandments,” and “doctrine” of Christ. It is clear that these terms indicate the same idea as the totality of New Testament truth.³ It is also interesting to note that similar expressions are used in Matthew 16:12 and Acts 2:42. The context of both of these passages being grammatically parallel to 2 John 9 would indicate the doctrine taught by both the Pharisees and Apostles, not doctrines about the Pharisees and Apostles.

As we give serious consideration to the aspect of biblical fellowship let us remember that all of humanity has the solemn obligation to abide in the totality of God’s New Testament truth! Romans 16:17-18, in addition to 2 John 9-11, necessitates a refusal of fellowship to those, who by false doctrines, would endanger their own souls and those who would hear them. It is a tragedy to note the false teaching of today: a denial of the New Testament pattern, a rejection of the gospel plan of salvation, the New Testament church, its organization, work, nature, worship, and identity, biblical ethics, the acceptance of denominational baptism, instrumental music, the missionary society, unscriptural marriages and a host of additional heresies from Hell!

To fail to obey God in rejection of His truth is to display a wrong attitude and fail to attain eternal fellowship with Him in Heaven.

BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP NECESSITATES A RIGHT ATTITUDE TOWARD HUMANITY

Understanding that biblical fellowship implies joint participation and association necessitates the importance of such activity with those of God’s faithful, as well as respecting the lines God has drawn, noting that some of His children no longer abide in truth. Also of importance is noting that those who have never obeyed the gospel and have therefore **never** been in covenant fellowship with God through Christ in the gospel.

If we propose to fellowship those who do not have fellowship with God, then we affect a pseudo-generosity, which is the essence of selfishness. We cannot, and must not, give that which is not ours to give. Often what appears to be generosity is but a base attempt to purchase acceptance, favor, or gratitude with a gift which is virtually stolen. There are people who will give you the shirt off of someone

else's back. A fellowship which proposes to be more extensive than God's is indeed presumptuous!

On the other hand, fellowship that is more limited than that of God's is also wrong. The individual that advocates a higher standard than the Lord displays a super righteousness that removes the New Testament as our standard of authority and places his own desires above that of the Scriptures. While indeed one should never lower God's standards, neither let us attempt to raise them.

In consideration regarding fellowship, let us remember that this God-given obligation is no different than the others. God does not require that which He does not give, i.e., knowledge of circumstances beyond our ability to learn. This means that in particular circumstances all outward signs of an individual's life may appear to indicate the individual being in the fellowship of God. One may have gone through the "correct" motions in being baptized, however, due to a lack of knowledge, faith, or repentance, this individual will still be a hardened sinner. We have correctly stated that ignorance of facts is no excuse. However, forced ignorance of circumstances beyond our ability to know would not be equal to unlearned facts. We are not discussing ignorance of God's law, but rather, of circumstances in the lives of others that we have no way of knowing! Ignorance of God's will is within itself a sin and certainly cannot be the justification for any additional sin.

The rule set forth in 1 John 1:3 is universal. The basis for biblical fellowship is fellowship with God. We may not have the ability to know the circumstances of another individual's mind or heart, for which God will not hold us accountable; however, such does not alter the basis and limitations of biblical fellowship.⁴

BIBLICAL FELLOWSHIP NECESSITATES CONSISTENCY

Our respect for the basis and limitations of biblical fellowship necessitates consistency of practice both in the lives of individual Christians as well as collectively in the local church. By the term **consistency** we refer to harmony of conduct or practice. In the practice of our own lives as individuals and collective actions of local congregations, we must take great care in applying the Word of God.

Recognition of God's law of inclusion regarding fellowship necessitates the proper understanding of the elements involved in becoming a member of the New Testament church, the brotherhood of Christ.

Faith, repentance, confession of faith in Christ, and baptism for the remission of past alien sins are not suggestions—they are divine requirements! One cannot obey what he does not understand and out of pure ignorance be added to the one true church of Christ (Mat. 13:14-15; Rom. 6: 17-18; Acts 2:47).

When one obeys the gospel, one is not joined to a human denomination, but rather, is baptized into the church of the Lord (1 Cor. 12:13). For one to fail to recognize God's law of inclusion is to fail in properly loving God, truth, and humanity. One does not honor God, correctly represent the gospel, or bring salvation to the lost by compromise.

Recognition of God's law of exclusion is also a must! We must never fellowship those excluded from the fellowship of God. Those advocating open fellowship and a New Hermeneutic do just that. We are living in a time when many hate the very concept of authority. The use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is either outright encouraged and/or being tolerated. This same mind-set accepts the principle of the missionary society, neo-Pentecostalism, female leadership in the local church, observance of religious holy days, abuses in the Lord's Supper, divided assemblies, acceptance of denominational baptism, and unauthorized unscriptural marriages.

Brethren, all of this false doctrine is bad enough, yet some individual Christians as well as local congregations, who are suppose to be opposed to all these heresies, remain in fellowship with some of the very preachers advocating them! This writer knows of several congregations who say that they are opposed to the Nashville Jubilee and then invite some of the speakers to come and preach for them. Ephesians 5:1-11, in conjunction with Romans 16:17-18 and 2 John 9-11, demand that no fellowship must be permitted between those who are faithful and those who are promoters and/or teachers of error.

Consistency also demands that we recognize that every difference among brethren cannot and should not bring a break in our fellowship. Many times pride and arrogance causes problems and division among brethren. Such was the case in the first century:

I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself

receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church (3 John 9-10).

Lines of fellowship must be drawn when any individual or congregation encourages and/or practices that which will lead one into sin and away from God and truth. Let us be very careful that such is the case! Let us be careful that such lines are not drawn over issues that do not affect our eternal destiny, or only promote political factions among brethren. Division based upon truth is indeed righteous, however division based upon opinion, judgment, or even worse, preacher politics and power struggles to gain advantage over some brother, or brethren is sinful.

It has been our purpose to emphasize **Right Attitudes And Fellowship**. May we as both individual Christians and local congregations have the love of God, truth, and our fellow man to practice the type of fellowship authorized by the New Testament

ENDNOTES

¹J. H. Thayer, *Greek-English Lexicon of The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1975), p. 352.

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³Alan E. Highers, "The Teaching of Christ, Fellowship And Unity," *Studies In 1, 2, 3 John*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1987), pp. 453-456.

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LOVE, COMPASSION, AND UNITY

Michael Light



Michael Light was born in Beeville, Texas, and was reared in the Lord's church by faithful parents, Leonard and Eileen Light. He is married to the former Elizabeth Carrie Brown. They have one daughter, Shelby Elizabeth. Michael graduated from Southwest School of Bible Studies in 1991, holds the B.A. (1994) from Southwest Texas State University, and is currently completing the M.A. thesis for Southwest Texas State University.

Michael is the editor of the quarterly paper, *Seek Ye First*. He has preached on campaigns in California, England, Jamaica and Tobago, and had done local work in New Braunfels. Michael is presently working with the congregation in Bangs, Texas.

INTRODUCTION

Perhaps no three biblical doctrines have been more perverted in recent years by the digressives among us than “love,” “compassion,” and “unity.” In fact, misconceptions and improper definitions of each of these three have even helped multiply the apostasy. One of two results will occur if we have improper perspectives on these topics: (1) We will think that “love” and “compassion” constrain us from confining and condemning, and that “unity” demands toleration in matters of doctrine, or (2) We will be unloving, non-compassionate and full of seditions and strifes, wars and fightings. Neither of these results is scriptural or acceptable. Yet, sadly, both are currently sweeping through the church. This study is designed to properly define and to make application of the biblical doctrines of “love,” “compassion,” and “unity.”

LOVE

The biblical doctrine of love is a tremendous study in and of itself. Let us simply look at the various Greek words and definitions to start this discussion. The Greek words *agapao* and *phileo* are behind the word *love* in our English translations of the New Testament. Though both words mean *love*, each word conveys a different basic idea. In *The Spiritual Sword*, Roy Deaver notes:

Concerning these words *Thayer* (GREEK-ENGLISH LEXICON OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, page 653) says: "As to the distinction between *agapan* and *philein*: the former...denotes a love founded in admiration, veneration, esteem...to be kindly disposed to one, wish one well; but the *philein* denotes an inclination prompted by sense and emotion...Hence men are said *agapan* God, not *philein*; and God said *agapasai ton kosmon* (Jno. 3:16) and *philein* the disciples of Christ (Jno. 16:27); Christ bids us *agapan* (not *philein*) *tous echthrous* (Mt. 5:44), because love as an emotion cannot be commanded, but only love as a choice."¹

In the same article he adds:

Trench (SYNONYMS OF THE NEW TESTAMENT, pages 40, 41) says: "The first (*agapao*)...expresses a more reasoning attachment, of choice and selection, from a seeing in the object upon whom it is bestowed that which is worthy of regard; or else from a sense that such is due toward the person so regarded;...which the second (*phileo*) is more instinctive, is more the feeling or natural affections, implies more passion...the notions of respect and reverence continually implied in the *agapao*, though not excluded by, are still not involved in the *phileo*. While men are continually bidden to *agapao* God, and good men declared to so do, the *phileo* God is commanded to them never."²

And finally:

Lenski says about *phileo* (Commentary, page 781): "...the love of affection and personal attachment..." About *agapao* he says; "...the love of the spirit and the reason." On the same page he has: "...above the *philein* stands the unfathomable and blessed *agapan*." Then, on page 1419 Lenski has: "The verb *agapan* is the love of intelligence, reason, and comprehension, coupled with corresponding purpose; in this its content it vastly outranks the other type of love. And *philein* expresses the love of mere personal affection or liking, including even the passions where the context requires, and no intelligence or high purpose is involved...Jesus never asked us to love our enemies in the sense of *philein*; he never himself loved his enemies in this way. But—*agapan*, yes, with this love God did love the world, and we can love our enemies, comprehending all that is wrong with them and reaching out with the mighty purpose of removing that wrong, sanctifying the world, converting our enemies."...Love is [*sic*] the sense of *agapao* and love in the sense of *phileo* are not mutually exclusive."³

We see from these citations that *agape* is commanded. We are to have this type of love for all mankind. It is simply a love that motivates us to provide what is the ultimate good for someone. *Phileo* is never commanded. We do not necessarily have warm affections

toward all mankind, but we must possess a strong sense (*agape*—love) of doing what is best (as God reveals) for them.

Unfortunately, most in the world (and now even in the church) have a misconception of love. **Love** has been reduced to a mere emotion and sentimentality. Love no longer carries with it the obligation to obey and submit. People simply affirm or declare a love for Christ and somehow this is seen as equal to an obedient scriptural love. In Matthew 7:21-23 we read:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity.

This text clearly affirms that it takes more than mere assertion to make one a child of God. The people to whom the Lord speaks in this passage were believers. They were worshiping Him. They were sincere and active in their religious efforts. But they were still lost.

False love has become a banner behind which march legions of false teachers and impenitent sinners. Even homosexuality is defended under the guise of, “Well, as long as they ‘love’ one another, it’s okay.” What a sick joke. Many ignorant and misinformed brethren are attempting to console and justify their sinful lifestyles. Most of the world enjoys living in sin and darkness. But God despises such. He is not impressed with their haughty disregard for His will. The Holy Writ demands compliance and submission to God as being part of the definition of scriptural love. Romans 11:22 says, “Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God: on them which fell, severity; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in *his* goodness: otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.” God will destroy those who die in sin. Do not forget: “*It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God*” (Heb. 10:31).

Many will no longer take a stand for the truth, as commanded (Jude 3), on the basis that it is “unloving” to do so. Friends, when we redefine the gospel as *unloving*, we are in sad shape. God loved us to the extent that He gave us His Son, who lived a perfect life and then died on our behalf (John 3:16). He then sent the Holy Spirit to guide the apostles as they revealed God’s plan for all mankind. That plan involves hearing (Rom. 10:17), believing (John 8:24), repenting (Luke

13:3), confessing (Rom. 10:10), and being baptized (Acts 2:38). If this is true (and it is), and if you will be damned eternally in hell if you fail to comply (and you will), then the kindest, most loving thing to ever do for someone is to tell them the truth. Paul reminded us that the consequences may be unpleasant in Galatians 4:16. He recognized that some would count us as enemies for simply telling them the truth. Christ had already warned us of the cost of discipleship in Matthew 10:34-38:

Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. And a man's foes *shall be* they of his own household. He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.

For *love's* sake (improper love) people are counseled to stay in unscriptural marriages. For *love's* sake denominationalism is not preached against. For *love's* sake heretical colleges and preaching schools are not marked and avoided (per Rom. 16:17-18). For *love's* sake we do not withdraw from disorderly members. For *love's* sake false teachers (preachers) are not removed from pulpits. Biblical love demands we provide the ultimate good for the people (God's will: not theirs, not ours). What does God teach? If we love Jesus, we must keep His commandments (John 14:15; 15:14).

COMPASSION

Of the three subjects under our consideration, compassion is probably the most neglected in our pulpits today. Just as love has been perverted, so has the biblical doctrine of compassion. Many of the liberals among us (those who loosen that which God has bound) have used compassion as a tool in moving into a social gospel. Riveting stories of poverty and neglect are skillfully spun in order to appeal to the compassion of the crowd. Many are more interested in "Habitat for Humanity" and "Impact" programs than the gospel. They build and paint houses, clothe the poor, provide soup and soap, but not the Savior. The source of our compassion, Christ, is overlooked.

The most often used Greek word for compassion is *oikteiro*. It is defined as having pity, a feeling of distress through the ills of others, to suffer with another, to have mercy. Many church members when

asked about the work of the local congregation begin to bring up their social events. The gospel is conspicuously missing. It seems as if every week one of the local bulletins is reporting on their “work.” Invariably, their heart strings are touched with stories of work being done to improve the physical lives of the poverty stricken. There is nothing wrong with benevolence. In fact, one of the works of the church is caring for the poor. But our primary emphasis must be the same as that of the Christ. We should be concerning ourselves with saving those who are lost and providing for the spirit rather than the flesh.

Most think that compassion equals toleration. “We should not judge,” (Mat. 7:1-5), is parroted by many. Others state: “We should not condemn.” Brethren, Jesus judged and condemned on the basis of right and wrong (Mat. 23). So did Stephen (Acts 7), Paul (Acts 17), Peter (Acts 2), and all of the other apostles and disciples. And so should we (Jude 3). Who among us will affirm that we have “matured” to a level of compassion that the Christ Himself did not attain? That’s blasphemy—pure unadulterated blasphemy (Luke 6:46).

Just like love, compassion can also be misconceived or not applied on the other side. Among many “conservatives” (faithful is a better word—those trying to abide within the authority of Scripture) there seems to be a general lack of compassion. Many among us seem to have developed a “dog-eat-dog” attitude even in regard to our faithful brethren. Compassion involves one’s attitude. Biblical compassion goes the extra mile. It allows for honest mistakes. If we are not compassionate toward all men, we are not faithful (Jam. 2:13). If we ever get to the point where we revel in the battle itself, when we enjoy running over someone, we are indeed in trouble. Some seem to pride themselves on getting someone, or putting them in their place. Brethren, this type of spiritual cannibalism is an ugly action that destroys much of our influence and retards our efforts from a dark and dying world.

As we think of compassion, the prophet Daniel comes to mind. In the fourth chapter of that great book we read of an interesting occurrence. The King of Babylon, Nebuchadnezzar, has had a dream (vision sent from God). The dream was a message from God of impending judgment. Because of the arrogance of Nebuchadnezzar’s heart God was going to take his kingdom from him. After

Nebuchadnezzar told Daniel the dream, he asked for the interpretation of it. As we read the text, it becomes clear that Daniel did not want to tell Nebuchadnezzar the interpretation. Daniel loved Nebuchadnezzar; he respected him as well. They were friends. In fact, Daniel was silent for one hour (v. 19) and his thoughts troubled him. He said, "My lord, the dream *be* to them that hate thee, and the interpretation thereof to thine enemies" (Dan. 4:19).

Nebuchadnezzar, however, insisted on the interpretation. He wanted to know what God's will on the subject was. Daniel loved him; he was compassionate toward him, but, friends, he told him the truth. Why is it that so often when we are asked a direct religious question, we shy away from answering it forthrightly? Why do we assume they really do not want to know? Daniel told the truth to Nebuchadnezzar, who would later see the fulfillment of the prophecy.

Likewise the rich young ruler of Mark 10 approached the Savior with life's most important question. "Good Master, what shall I do that I may inherit eternal life?" (v. 17). He came to the right source, he asked the right question, and he received the right answer. But the answer was not the one he wanted. He, like many today, rejected the Lord's answer. What is perhaps most interesting about this occasion is that the Lord did not pursue the young man. He did not restate His answer. He did not try to sugar coat it in order to make it more palatable. He simply told him the truth and left the burden of responding properly to him. The Lord was the most compassionate person to ever walk the earth. Yet through His example of biblical compassion we see the way we should address the world.

If we withhold the truth, we withhold the one thing that can save souls. How confused some have become on biblical compassion. When we consider allowing one to burn in hell as opposed to teaching the gospel whereby he might be saved, we have become Satan's allies. I recall an incident in a congregation in East Texas when I was a boy, in which a man who was a Baptist "responded" to the invitation. He came forward and expressed his desire to place membership with the congregation of the Lord's people. The preacher accepted him, and the elders concurred. This event was the final straw in a series of events that finally motivated my family to leave that congregation. The elders and the preacher later came out to the house to discuss our leaving with my parents. When my father asked about the above

nonmember placing membership, the preacher responded by asking, “Would you have us hurt his feelings?” To which my father responded, “No, I guess you just let him go to hell with a smile on his face.” These types of occurrences seem to be common place. Why? Many are misguided as to what it means to be compassionate.

After delivering a series of sermons in Northeast Texas a few years ago, I was being mildly rebuked by an elder concerning the nature of one of my sermons (it happened to be on the subject of hell.) He remarked, “You can attract more flies with honey than you can with vinegar.” To which I responded, “That would be fine if we were trying to catch flies, but we are about the business of saving souls.” In Acts 17 the apostle Paul did not hesitate nor water down the message. He began with the error of those to whom he spoke and called for their repentance. There is a great temptation among preachers to avoid the very subjects that need to be preached. One cannot consider himself a faithful preacher and not declare the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:27).

Though the above attitudes may be prevalent in the world, the Word still teaches right and wrong (Pro. 14:12; John 14:16; 2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17). The Word still speaks of the necessity of repentance (Luke 13:3). In 2 Corinthians 7:10 we read, “Godly sorrow worketh repentance.” If I must repent (Luke 13:5), and godly sorrow precedes repentance, then I must be made to feel sorry (recognize that I am wrong), then repent (change my heart, mind, will). Then I must submit to the totality of the plan of salvation. There can be no conversion without one coming to a knowledge of his or her sin. One must admit he is wrong before he can ever be right.

We must **never**, ever, apologize for the truth. A false sense of compassion restrains us from doing that which is right—that and a lack of knowledge. I do not have to revel in one’s unpleasant circumstances just because I tell him the truth. Some act as if we are sadistic and enjoy telling people of their wrong deed(s). This makes about as much sense as accusing a doctor who gives a gloomy diagnosis. If one is truly sick, the proper medical attention must be given. The same is true concerning sin and its solution. Biblical compassion motivates us to tell the one lost in sin the truth, for it is only through the truth that anyone can be saved (John 8:32). Daniel loved Nebuchadnezzar, and his love of Nebuchadnezzar and his compliance with God’s will

motivated him to lovingly and compassionately tell him the truth. If I have biblical compassion, I am more interested in saving souls than serving soup.

The longsuffering aspect of compassion should always be employed. I would rather wait too long or try too hard, than to give up prematurely on anyone's soul. There does indeed come a time when we should shake the dust from our feet (Mat. 10:14) and cease to cast pearls before swine (Mat. 7:6). But let us never use these passages to excuse ourselves from teaching the gospel. The parable of the sower should show us God expects us to attempt to teach everyone (Mat. 13:3-23). Just before His leaving the earth, Christ said:

All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you always, *even* unto the end of the world (Mat. 28:18-20).

Let us never forget the purpose of our mission.

UNITY

In John 17:20-21 we read:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me.

This statement has been vastly abused by the apostates among us over the past several years. The interpretation is given that all "believers" should be unified in Christ. The espousers of this doctrine are including all (any kind of) *believers*. Max Lucado has reworded Jeff Walling's infamous Tulsa workshop speech of 1992 into the following liberal anthem: "Any man who calls God, Father is my brother." Hog Wash! Jesus, Himself, showed in Matthew 7:21 that it takes more than just "any type" of belief. The Lord said, "Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven." The liberals among us do not really believe this passage any longer. One can have some faith and still be damned. In Luke 6:46 Christ said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" Mental assent and verbal profession do not equal biblical faith.

The capacity of these men to rewrite the Bible is amazing. For the sake of *unity*, much, if not most, of the gospel has been eliminated. God's will is relegated to a lesser point of importance than the *unity* of all others. They act as if it is a sin to preach on or talk about any topic that might cause division. Recently I was involved in a planning session regarding topic selection for an area preacher's retreat. I suggested we should study several controversial topics (hand clapping while singing, Promise Keepers, singing during the Lord's Supper, etc.). You would have thought I had slapped them. The fact of the matter was they did not wish to deal with any aspect of these topics because many of them either participate in such or fellowship those who do. What a shame. If it is a sin to "rock the boat" then Jesus was the chief of sinners. Christ was involved in controversy the entirety of His ministry. Revisionist historians can deny this fact, but the texts demand it (Mat. 6:1-6; Mat. 15:7-9; Mat. 23; John 7; John 8, et al.).

It is not a sin to stand where Jesus stood (Acts 20:27). The whole counsel of God is to be taught regardless of the world's reception or rejection of it (2 Tim. 4:2). The idea of non-controversial preaching is ludicrous. Not even John 3:16, can be taught and offend no one. Jesus offended many people on many occasions, yet He was still blameless (Mat. 13:57; John 6:68). Many will stand in pulpits and lambast negative preaching. Those who oppose *negative* preaching and passing *judgment* on others do not hesitate to negatively judge those they deem to be offenders. The Bible as a whole and the New Testament specifically teach that sin must be opposed. Jesus was **against** some things. We must not give an inch on the position that sin must be rebuked (Eph. 2:1; Isa. 59:1-2; John 1:3, 6-7). Repentance must be developed (Acts 2:38; 17:30) and compliance must result in a surrender to God's will (Rom. 6:16-18). To fail in these areas is to be damned (Rev. 20:14-15). No faithful man or woman of God ever opposed God's will on whether it was perceived as being *negative* or *positive*.

Many act as if unity is impossible. But God, through His verbal, plenary, inspired Word teaches it is not only possible—it is essential. We, like the Psalmist of old, should realize: "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). No one should think we who uphold doctrinal fidelity are "anti" unity. We simply want to comply with scriptural unity. We can

affirm the real possibility of unity for several reasons: (1) Jesus prayed for unity (John 17), (2) Paul preached for unity (1 Cor. 1:1-10), and (3) the early church practiced unity (Acts 4:32). The Bible sets out the perfect plan and pattern for us in Ephesians 4:3-6. We read of: (1) One body—unity of organization (Mat. 16:18; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18; Rom. 16:16); (2) One Spirit—unity of revelation. We cannot preach different doctrines (1 Tim. 4:1). We have **all** truth (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Tim. 3:16-17); (3) One hope—unity of purpose (1 Cor. 15:24; Col. 1:15; Tit. 1:2; 2 Pet. 3:10); (4) One Lord—unity of authority (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 2:36; Acts 9:5; Rom. 1:14; “Lord of Lord and King of kings,” Rev. 19:16); (5) One faith—unity of doctrine or teaching (2 Tim. 4:1ff; Jude 3); (6) One baptism—unity of practice (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; Rom. 6:3-4; 1 Cor. 12:13; Gal. 3:26-27; Eph. 5:25-26; Col. 2:12); (7) One God—unity of worship (Exo. 20:3; Deu. 6:4; Col. 3:5).

Yes, indeed, God expects (yea demands) unity among His children. In 2 Peter 1:3 the Holy Writ records all that pertains to life and godliness has been given. In 2 Timothy 2:15 we are taught that through the Word we can stand before God approved. In 1 Corinthians 1:10, we read:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Men may mock the idea of true unity, but God demands it of all who would be faithful. Let us never give up even though it may require work on our part. The Word of God is the ingredient through which unity is possible.

Unity is to be had with all who comply with His Word. If I am in fellowship with God and you are in fellowship with God, then we are in fellowship with each other. I have no right to determine whom I will and will not fellowship. I cannot withhold fellowship from anyone God is fellowshiping. Nor can I fellowship anyone whom God is not fellowshiping. We must never divide over matters of opinion. Likewise we cannot unify with those who are at odds with God’s Word in matters of obligation.

CONCLUSION

May God help us all to endeavor to cultivate the biblical doctrines of love, compassion, and unity. Let us not be fearful or reactionary in our approach to them either. Just because some have abused them, does not give us the right to ignore them. As in all things, let us keep Colossians 3:17 in mind, “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.”

ENDNOTES

¹Roy Deaver, “What is The Meaning of ‘Love’? (Notes On Agapao And Phileo),” *The Spiritual Sword*, April 1982, p. 4.

²Ibid.

³Deaver, p. 4, 5.

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MISCONCEPTIONS OF FELLOWSHIP

Don Tarbet



Don Tarbet is a native Texan. He is married to the former Faye Bennett, and they have two children and five grandchildren. Don attended Freed-Hardeman College. He has done local preaching in Tennessee, Arizona, New Mexico, Texas, and Oklahoma. He has also done campaign work in Scotland, South Africa, and Ghana. Don is the author of 22 tracts and a book, *Exposé of Errors About Adultery*. He debated Jon Edwards and Dan Billingsly on divorce and remarriage. Don has worked with the congregation in Colbert, Oklahoma, since 1976.

A *misconception* of **anything** is a “wrong” thought or idea, which is usually put into words or action. It is sort of like a “misunderstanding.” If we misunderstand **truth**, we are in error, whether we know it or not. When people do not understand the Bible **alike**, someone is in error. *All may* be wrong, but all cannot be right. We can be right only when we accept what the Scripture actually says and teaches.

What we **know** about *fellowship* is what the New Testament says about it. We may have a conception of what and whom we are to fellowship, and it be a MIS-conception. This **could** be the result of a strong desire for unity (to truly see people in agreement) or a strong desire for popularity (by identifying in a movement that seems to create crowds and high emotionalism). This may promote “fellowship,” but is it the fellowship that God wants? True fellowship is both **vertical** and **horizontal**. A fellowship that is all horizontal is not worth the energy it takes to even think about it. **Only** those with vertical fellowship can have **proper** horizontal fellowship. John wrote, “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” (1 John 1:3). John wanted others to have fellowship with him and the other apostles (though many had died by this time), but he pointed out that **their** fellowship (“our fellowship”) was vertical—“with the Father.”

John went on to point out that to **say** one has fellowship with God **while** walking in **darkness** is a lie. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). Then, on the positive side, those who walk in the **light** actually **have** fellowship with God. Those who are in the light are those who have been enlightened by the Word of Christ. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Those who adhere to the proper doctrine or teaching Christ gave can have God, and John says **their** fellowship was “with the Father.” This means that even the aged, all-loving “apostle of love” believed in strictly following and remaining **in** the doctrine.

There are many *misconceptions of fellowship*. Before we get into some of them, it would be well to **define** fellowship further. Vine says the noun form is from *koinonia*, meaning: “(a) ‘communion, fellowship, sharing in common.’”¹ He points out that the word is translated **communion**, **fellowship**, or **communication**. The Greek *koinos* (meaning “a partaker or partner”) is kin to *koinonia*. Then the verb form is *koinoneo*, which describes what is done to **have** fellowship. The Philippians **had** fellowship with Paul by what they “gave” (Phi. 1:5, 7; 4:14-16). We are to **have** “no fellowship” with **any** “unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). If we **do**, we are fellowshiping **sin**, by partaking of their “evil deeds” (2 John 10-11).

The synonyms used by Paul in 2 Corinthians 6 are also helpful.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people (2 Cor. 6:14-16).

Note the words **fellowship**, **communion**, **concord**, **part**, and **agreement** as used in the text. Paul contrasts light with *darkness* (which relates to Eph. 5:11), among other things; but then he properly pointed out that if we have fellowship with **any** kind of darkness (moral, spiritual or otherwise) that we lose fellowship with God. He stated that we must: (1) **be** the temple of God (Zec. 6:12-13; 1 Cor. 3:16; 2 Cor. 6:16; Eph. 2:21-22), and (2) **be** separate from darkness. “Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the

Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you” (2 Cor. 6:17). If we don’t keep separate from error, God will **not** receive us into His fellowship.

Now let’s examine some *Misconceptions Of Fellowship* (erroneous thoughts and practices regarding our participation in worship and associations with other religious bodies).

FELLOWSHIP IN THE DEITY OF CHRIST

Many liberals have developed this concept through a **perversion** of 2 John 9, in an effort to have a broader fellowship by the acceptance of several who differ in **some** or **many** beliefs and practices, but who **agree** with us on the “deity of Christ.” John stated that we **must** abide in “the doctrine of Christ.” It is argued that this passage teaches that the “doctrine of Christ” has to do **only** with His **divine** nature as the Son of God. In other words, as long as we **accept** the deity of Christ, we are God’s children, no matter what else we believe and teach in religion. This basically would take us into the fellowship of most Protestant and Catholic bodies throughout the land, who have at least **some** concept of the deity of Christ, who like the eunuch could **say**, “I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God” (Acts 8:37). The eunuch **believed** Jesus to be the Son of God **before** he was baptized, but if had decided **not** to be baptized, would he have been our brother anyhow? Many today would surely receive him at the point of his faith.

Another approach to the same concept is that the **gospel** is preached to the alien, and **doctrine** is taught to those who have **obeyed** the gospel. It is argued that if one has obeyed the **gospel**, he is God’s child, **having accepted the deity of Christ** (which, ironically, is “doctrine,” as per 2 John 9). After accepting the “doctrine of deity” in the gospel, “doctrine” supposedly no longer matters. Let’s zero in on the “Gospel-Docctrine Fellowship.” Two men have largely been responsible for promoting this concept—Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett, the latter of whom remains at this writing. They argued basically that there was **one fact** (the Sonship of Jesus), and **one act**—baptism into Christ, and that instrumental music, church names, etc., were in the realm of “doctrine” and should **not** determine fellowship. The obvious purpose was to open the door of “fellowship” between the church of Christ and the Independent Christian Church

(in particular), since they also practice baptism for the remission of sins.

A more recent promoter is Rubel Shelly of Nashville, Tennessee. He changed gospel to “Big F Fellowship” and doctrine to “Little f fellowship.” His efforts were to promote “little f” fellowship between those who differ, but **have** “Big F” fellowship with God “in baptism.” Then that “Big F” fellowship began to be expanded to those who had been baptized for **any good reason**. Eventually, it was extended to the unimmersed, though “baptized” (sprinkled). Once the door is opened, it is hard to close.

The distinction made regarding the distinction between gospel and doctrine is unwarranted. A simple observation from the book of Romans has been often used by brethren to expose this falacy. It is true that the *gospel* needs to be preached to alien sinners (Mark 16:15-16), but it is **also** true that it needs to be preached to believers (Rom. 1:15). It is true that *doctrine* is for believers (1 Tim. 4:16), but it is **also** true that it is needed for alien sinners (Rom. 6:17-18). So, what proves too much proves nothing at all! Incidentally, Paul told Timothy (a believer) to continue **in** the doctrine, that he might save himself. Why is that? Regarding this matter, the late Cecil N. Wright observed:

This would seem to ignore the fact that one ceases to “have God” if he abides not in “the doctrine of Christ” (2 John 9) and that, if one comes who does not bring “this doctrine,” he is not to be received (vs. 10-11). They explain, however, that “the doctrine of Christ” here mentioned is not doctrine of which Christ is author but is doctrine about Christ—namely, that He has “come in the flesh” (v. 7)—to deny which is to vitiate the gospel, which is the basis of fellowship. This does not change the fact, however, that what the Scriptures call “doctrine” is also by them made a test of fellowship.²

In the same setting, brother Wright continues:

But that is not all. Jesus said, “But in vain do they worship me, teaching as their doctrines the precepts of men” (Mat. 15:9). Also, the apostle Paul stated: “But the Spirit saith expressly, that in later times some shall fall away [apostatize] from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits and doctrines of demons, through the hypocrisy of men that speak lies, branded in their own conscience as with a hot iron; forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God created to be received with thanksgiving by them that believe and know the truth” (1 Tim. 4:1-3).³

Brother Wright correctly observes that **worship** can be made *void* by **doctrines** (even though they are human doctrines), and that an **apostasy** can also occur as a result of teaching and heeding human doctrines. If it be argued, “Well, those are human doctrines—not Bible doctrines,” let it be remembered that **all** Bible doctrines are to be **kept** in the first place. Is it the case that human doctrines should not be made a test of fellowship, or should they **never** be kept in the first place? Regarding divine doctrine, we should not divide over it, but we should **keep** it. Then, if it is not kept, it can be a proper cause of division or a matter of fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP WITH DENOMINATIONS

This is an extension of our first point. No longer is it a matter of fellowshiping the Christian Church **only** (those practicing immersion for the remission of sins), but now the arms of fellowship are being unlawfully extended to actually embrace any and all denominations. The church of Christ is criticized by some among us (who contend that we are also a denomination or sect) for **not** becoming a piece of the denominational jig-saw puzzle to make the “church of Christ” complete, with the “Church of Christ (denomination)” added to the rest of the denominational bodies. If we did such, we would **all** be together, it is argued. Yes, we would all be together in **error**, but not in the **unity** God authorizes. Some seem to think that the true church of Christ would then be complete, with all different bodies loving and fellowshiping one another. Is it not strange that the “church of Christ” is standing in the way of the “church of Christ” being united by **not** conforming to the **disunity** that exists in the religious world? If the church of Christ is but a denomination, it is not **needed** at all, and should cease to exist. If it did cease, all that would be left would be denominations that are not needed, either. So, they too should cease to exist. If they **did** cease, would that **end** the “church of Christ,” or would it end denominationalism? Did Christ come into the world to build a church that is made up of non-essential denominations? If any one or all are non-essential, then the church itself is not essential to salvation.

Christ did not build the entirety of denominationalism, or any **one** of them. They are the work of men’s hands. “Except the LORD build the house, they labour in vain that build it” (Psa. 127:1). So, the

church of Christ is **not** a collection of different denominations that teach conflicting doctrines, and yet “fellowship” one another, but it **is** that one body of the saved. It consists of those who have believed, repented of sins, confessed faith, and been immersed in water to **be** saved. It consists of those same people who then meet each week to worship in acappella singing, Bible teaching, prayer, giving, and the Lord’s Supper. If we cease to do these things, we cease to be the one body or church of Christ. If this body ceases to exist, then Christ has no body or church upon this earth. His one body is not made up of a monstrosity of little different kinds of warring or non-warring denominations, Paul warned that there would be a departure from the faith that would **not** meet God’s approval (1 Tim. 4:1-3). The result would be a movement that would **exist**, but not *lawfully*. So, to exist as **something** is not enough. The church **did** exist in the first century (Mat. 16:18; Acts 2:47; Col. 1:18; Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; etc.). It exists today as a distinct body, even though there are some “among us” who are zealously working to make us like the denomi-“nations” around us (cf., 1 Sam. 8:5).

Max Lucado of Austin, Texas, is one of those leading the charge against clearly identifiable Christianity. He preaches error and practices error. He has extended his fellowship to both Catholic and Protestants of any stripe and calls them his brothers, while downgrading those of us who will not join with them. When he meets with them, he tells **them** that we are **all** in God’s Navy, on the Good Ship of Fellowship that is sailing into heaven. Flowery words will not get the job done. He spoke before the Baptist Church “pastored” by Buckner Fanning, and told them “there was no significant difference between the churches of Christ and them. [Except maybe that a few worry too much about doctrine.] He said we are all in the Lord’s ‘navy.’ We are all on the same ship.”⁴ He said, “Whenever I see a man call God ‘Father,’ I see a brother.”⁵

In his guest sermon, Lucado said, he will use the allegory of Christians serving in God’s navy: Some serve below, some on the upper decks. When they walk around they see people with different clothes, with different views on how to get to land. But when it’s time to fight, they stand shoulder to shoulder to get the job done.⁶

Max is taking a military concept that puts *everyone* in the Navy. To be consistent, we would have to conclude that soldiers, marines,

and airmen are not really soldiers, marines, and airmen, but all are **sailors** in the Navy—whether they know it or not. Such would be a slap in the face of men in different branches of the military, as well as to God's people today. Why **call** a soldier a *sailor* to make the **Navy** look united? Max admits that they have different ideas as to how to get there. Can you imagine a ship with a bunch of soldiers, marines, airmen, and sailors **all** trying to agree on how to arrive at a destination? **That** is why there is a ship's captain. Unless the sailors follow the captain, they will likely not reach their destination. Christ is the Captain of our salvation, and He says there is only **one** way to jet to heaven. Max would make all the military into sailors, and all denominational people into Christians. The difference between Max and Christ is that Christ has only **one ship** going to heaven, and He tells us exactly what to do to get **on** the ship, and how to remain **in** the ship. Like Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, "Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved" (Acts 27:31).

In a recent issue of *Once More with Love*, Leroy Garrett took a look at restoration history. He pointed out that brethren then differed, but still "got along" because they held "forth the Head, who is Christ."⁷ "So, it is unity in diversity—with limits. Faithfulness to Christ must always be the rule for unity and fellowship. **So long as they hold forth the Head, who is Christ!**"⁸ If those in the restoration period got along so well, why did the Christian Church finally separate from the church of Christ by 1906? Why did those in the Christian Church and Disciples' fellowship never quite get it together in fellowship? Why did the Disciples abandon the restoration plea in 1968? Why are we still separate today? Truth of the matter is, some are **not** "holding forth the Head, who is Christ." At a recent gathering of liberals in Dallas, Texas, Lynn Anderson was questioned about his belief in a *pattern* for the church today. He answered that he did indeed believe in a Pattern—**Jesus Christ**. All this goes to emphasize the **person** (the Head), but not His **message** (the Word). The Head once said, "And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?" (Luke 6:46).

Why call Jesus Lord if we are not going to do what He says? **His** Word is the basis for our fellowship, and the basis for our entering heaven (John 12:48; Mat. 7:21-23).

Sometimes the “argument” is made that the disciples were once rebuked for forbidding some to follow Christ that they did not recognize; so we today should not forbid others to follow Christ. Note the text.

And John answered and said, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name; and we forbad him, because he followeth not with us. And Jesus said unto him, Forbid *him* not: for he that is not against us is for us (Luke 9:49-50).

If this is the best the liberals can do to justify **their** justifying denominationalism, they need to pack up their bags and go into oblivion. Let’s consider the text. In the first place, the disciples admitted that the man was actually casting out devils, and that it was done **in the name** of Jesus. Now, if he was **doing** what the Lord authorized, he should **not** be forbidden from doing it. In the second place, the disciples **really** objected to the man because he refused to “follow” **them**. As long as one is doing what Jesus commanded, he is indeed a disciple. Because one does not follow **with** other believers in **every** action does not make him an unbeliever. In the third place, Jesus said those not **against** them were with them. The man obviously was not opposed to Christ and the disciples, for he was acting in the “name” of the Lord, and actually **doing** the right thing—not pretending or just claiming to be doing it.

Denominations today are different—they **are opposed** to the church of Christ. They are opposed to our claim of distinctness and adherence to the Word of God. Nothing suits them better than to see us break down our resistance and participate with them in error. They **delight** in our apostasy. They do not, as **a** denomination, claim to be **all** the whole church, and they oppose **any** group that does. They can act friendly toward us in an effort to get us to compromise, but they most certainly are **against** us, and not **for** us as we stand today. If we would be willing to just wear the title “Church of Christ” and stop claiming to be the “church of Christ” as revealed in the New Testament, and **accept** them, and go along with their beliefs—they would **no longer** be against us. Certainly there is a difference in the context of what happened in Luke 9, and what is being promoted by liberals today. Only the blind could fail to see it.

REFUSAL TO WITHDRAW FELLOWSHIP FROM OTHER CONGREGATIONS

Some have the misconception that one congregation cannot disfellowship or mark another congregation because of apostasy of the entire congregation. What is the difference between disfellowshipping and withholding fellowship from a wayward congregation that **needs** to be marked for the protection of those sincerely striving to do things the Lord's way?

We have a copy of a letter from a congregation in Ghana, West Africa, which publicly marked a group that has gone the way of Dan Billingsly (denying that Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John belong to the New Testament so as to get rid of Matthew 19:9), and are guilty of many other major departures from the truth. Virtually, the **only** similarity now is the name "Church of Christ" that is a part of their church sign. Good brethren in Ghana needed to be warned about this congregation, lest they get involved and lose their souls. They needed to be marked or identified as being in error. Did not Paul say to mark those that cause divisions contrary to the doctrine learned (Rom. 16:17-18)? Would not this include those who became an active **part** of this division by blindly following blind leaders (Mat. 15:13-14)? Paul said we are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11). If an apostate body forms out of the church, is it a work of darkness? Are only the **leaders** in "darkness," and the rest of the members still in the "light" (when obviously they are not walking in it)? Think of the Dayspring congregations that developed from the Tulsa Workshop, the Christian Fellowship movements, and the Community Churches that have sprung up in our midst by those groups who are "tired of commandments" and "anxious for change." Are those who **led** the movements the only ones to be disfellowshipped? What about those who follow and persist in error itself? Peter said that not only (1) false teachers, but (2) those who follow their pernicious ways—**both** cause the way of truth to "be evil spoken of" (2 Pet. 2:1-2).

To the Corinthian church, Paul gave a command to deliver a man to Satan (withdraw from) who had taken his father's wife to be his own. He evidently remained **in** the congregation with the support and encouragement of the brethren to keep on in his immoral relationship. Suppose just for a moment that when the congregation was **preparing**

to deliver the man to Satan, that he and his wife decided to **leave** the congregation **first**, and just worship in their home? Could the church “not touch” the situation because they had formed another “congregation”? Suppose one, two, six, or eight other members had gone **with them** in this new congregation? Could the church **no longer** carry out Paul’s command, just because they “quit coming”? By forming another congregation **real** quickly before a withdrawal, would this have canceled out the church’s obligation? **Certainly not!!**

The late W. N. (Bill) Jackson penned it well in the following words.

May one congregation withdraw fellowship from another? Remembering it is sinfulness that brings about withdrawal of fellowship, with a persisting in sin despite efforts of the faithful in teaching and pleading for correction, it would be a poor rule that had only one application. That is, the Lord’s rule on breaking off of fellowship has only one limited application, and that is right within a congregation? Advantage would be given the Devil, in that while 5, 50 or 250 people persisting in error can be thus dealt with, within a congregation, if these 5, 50 or 250 pulled out and formed a congregation across the street, they could not be so marked and disfellowshipped! There is no reason to think that Romans 16:17,18 and Ephesians 5:11 would be thus of limited application. It seems foolish on the face of it to think that a congregation so marked by apostasy would be allowed to continue to influence faithful saints, and have unlimited access to them in terms of fellowship and association, drawing more and more of the faithful away from the truth day-by-day, and nothing can be done! A sinful congregation can be disfellowshipped!⁹

Truly, there are surely many other misconceptions of Fellowship, especially regarding fellowship **within** a local congregation. No attempt was made to deal with those in this study, but rather with those areas that relate to fellowship outside the local congregation. These seem to be the most troublesome in the brotherhood today. May God help us to have a right attitude toward the fellowship of God.

ENDNOTES

¹W. E. Vine, *Vine’s Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), p. 233.

²Cecil N. Wright, “The Liberal view of Christian Fellowship,” *The Spiritual Sword*, January 1974, pp. 7-8.

³Wright, p. 8.

⁴Bill Haberman, “Max Lucado, There You Go Again!,” *Contending For The Faith*, August 1995, p. 7.

⁵Ron Wilson, "Pair of preachers planning to swap their pulpits April 2," *Contending For The Faith*, August 1995, p. 7.

⁶Wilson, p. 7.

⁷Leroy Garrett, "They Differed But Still United," *Once More With Love*, October 1997, p. 2.

⁸Garrett, p. 2.

⁹W. N. (Bill) Jackson, "From The Ft. Worth Lectureship Forum," *The Southwesterner*, January 25, 1989.

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FELLOWSHIP AND JUDGING

Ted J. Clarke



Ted J. Clarke was born in Illinois. He is married to the former Sherrie Mooney, and they have three children and seven grandchildren. Ted has served in local work in Illinois, Missouri, Indiana, Alabama, and Arkansas. He graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1972, has a B.A. degree from Alabama Christian School of Religion, and has done graduate work at ACSR and Harding Graduate School. Ted has conducted meetings in 14 states and has made two mission trips to Jamaica. He speaks on several lectureships, written for brotherhood publications, and participated in several debates. Ted has worked with the congregation in Mammoth Spring, Arkansas since 1991. He has served as editor of the *Fulton County Gospel News* since 1991.

INTRODUCTION

The voices are numerous and loud. They come from the worldly, from denominational religion, and from within the Lord's church. What are they saying?

You have no right to judge me. I can do anything I want to do....Tolerate those who differ with you, disregarding any differences as long as one claims faith in Christ....There is unity in diversity and we must change our bigoted way of demanding that other heritages conform to our practices before we have fellowship with them.

Considering the import of these claims and admonitions, it behooves us to look seriously at the concepts of fellowship and judging. If we are in error, let us admit where and change. If we verify our practices from the Scriptures, let us hold our ground without fear of or partiality to any man or group who oppose us.

DEFINITIONS

The word *fellowship* (Greek—*koinonia*) comes from a family of words that means to have things in common, it is thus defined as "association, communion, fellowship, close relationship."¹ Fellowship also has reference to "participation, sharing in something, proof of brotherly unity."² We have fellowship with God (1 John 1:6-7), with the Son (1 Cor. 1:9), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14). If we do not have this vertical fellowship with the Godhead, we cannot have

the horizontal fellowship with others who have fellowship with God (1 John 1:3).

To *judge* is from the Greek word *krino*, meaning to “separate, distinguish, then select, prefer.”³ Other uses are closely related, like “think, consider, reach a decision, decide, propose, intend...pass judgment upon, express an opinion about.”⁴ *Judging*, for the purposes of this lesson means to consider and think upon the Word of God as to who is or is not a faithful Christian, thereby deciding to whom we can or cannot extend our fellowship. Our only concern is to know the truth of the Scriptures and the real facts about what any person has or has not done to become a Christian and to remain faithful to Christ.

INITIAL FELLOWSHIP

God created us as free moral agents, meaning that we can make our own choices which will in the end determine our eternal destiny. The events in the Garden of Eden with Adam and Eve verify this. Although God had commanded them **not** to eat the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, He did not force them to obey Him (Gen. 2:15-17). Adam blamed Eve, Eve blamed the serpent, but God held all three accountable (Gen. 3:12-19). Even though God would have had it otherwise in His perfect will, His permissive will created mankind with our free will, and “all have sinned” (Rom. 3:23). We will answer for these sins in the final judgment (Rom. 14:12), unless forgiven through Christ (John 8:24; 14:6; Acts 4:12).

Spiritual fellowship with God and one’s fellow man is based on the standard of God’s Word, not the thoughts of mankind. Isaiah 8:20 says, “To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, *it is* because *there is* no light in them.” Jesus stated, “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The Lord specified that fellowship with Him is based on our loving Him by keeping His commandments (John 14:15, 21). He further explained, “If a man love me, he will keep my words: and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him” (John 14:23). Only those who keep Christ’s words by believing in Him as Lord (Acts 2:36; Rom. 10:9); repenting of past sins (Acts 2:38; 17:30-31); confessing that faith orally (Acts 8:37; Rom. 10:9-10); and being baptized (immersed) into Christ to have their sins forgiven (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21);

only these truly “put on Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27) and have fellowship in “all spiritual blessings...in Christ” (Eph. 1:3). God only adds these to Christ’s spiritual body, the church (Acts 2:47; 1 Cor. 12:13; Eph. 5:23).

Therefore, it seems unquestionable that we must judge (determine) if one has obeyed these requirements of the gospel before we can extend to him or her the fellowship of those of “like precious faith” (2 Pet. 1:1). One can only claim to be one of the “children of God” when by faith he is baptized “into Christ” (Gal. 3:26-27) and continues to love God through keeping “his commandments” (1 John 5:3). This latter phrase brings up the necessary topic of **continuing in fellowship** with God and fellow-saints.

CONTINUING IN FELLOWSHIP

Jesus and John have both testified to the need of commandment-keeping in order to continue in fellowship with the Godhead and thereby with other Christians. In John 14:23 the Lord literally says, “If one keeps on loving me” (present tense, active voice),⁵ “he will continue to keep my words” (indicative mood, future tense, active voice used as an imperative mood, present tense, active voice).⁶ In order to keep on loving Christ, one **must** continue to keep His words (commandments) (cf., John 14:15, 21; 1 John 5:2-3).

A further statement from the apostle John is conclusive. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). In John 3:19-21 the apostle relates “darkness” to evil deeds, as contrasted with those who “doeth truth cometh to the light.” Doing anything that is opposed to God’s truth is evil and walking in darkness. These can be immoral deeds, mentioned as “darkness” by the apostle Paul (1 Cor. 5:1-13; Eph. 5:3-11), or false teaching that is contrary to the “doctrine of Christ,” which John also characterizes as “evil deeds” (2 John 9-11). We will deal with this latter Scripture reference in some detail later. It is also worth noting that Paul excluded from fellowship with other Christians the impenitent, immoral man of 1 Corinthians 5:1-13 **and** the false teachers Hymenaeus, Alexander, and Philetus (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:15-18).

If we go back to 1 John, he mentions that though we sin if we “keep walking in darkness” (present tense, active voice),⁷ we can return to “keep on walking in the light” (same verb), where, although

we occasionally sin, “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:6-9). “Walking in the light” has been accurately portrayed as “direction, not perfection!” That is, we will occasionally sin (1 John 1:8, 10), but if we are penitent and confess those sins God will forgive them. In such cases we can pray for one another’s restoration to God’s grace (cf., Acts 8:22-24; 1 John 5:16). However, when one refuses to admit his sins and continues in them, or is rebellious to pleas for repentance, we cannot fellowship such people. Since they continue to “walk in darkness,” they do not have fellowship with God, and we cannot fellowship them.

To summarize, Christians are to make judgments about fellowship in at least three areas. We must judge: (1) whether or not one has initially obeyed the gospel and has been admitted into the fellowship of the Godhead, and thereby fellowship with all Christians; (2) whether or not one is continuing to “doeth truth,” and thus God continues to extend fellowship to that individual; and, (3) whether or not if one has erred from the truth in teaching or practice, and, if so, has this person truly repented and been restored to God’s grace and fellowship?

SOME HYPOCRITICAL JUDGES

As noted in the “Introduction,” there are a variety of voices even in the Lord’s church who plead for “tolerance” of diverse views without refusing fellowship to those who differ. Some ask for this tolerance to include areas pertaining to the truthfulness of Christ’s statements about Himself and biblical teaching about what we must do to be saved. The following is one such example.

There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who differ on...whether the Lord’s Supper must be taken every Sunday, or whether instrumental music is used in worship. There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on eschatological theories such as premillennialism, ecclesiological [church] matters such as congregational organization, or soteriological [salvation] matters such as whether baptism is “for” or “because of” the remission of sins.⁸

Another example is Max Lucado, who wrote a chapter in one of his books called, “Life Aboard the Fellow-Ship.” In that chapter he makes a blanket statement, “[O]nly God can judge my neighbor,”⁹ without noting that the Scriptures **forbid some** judgment (Mat. 7:1ff)

and **command other types** of judgment (John 7:24). He goes on to discuss his “heritage” (by which he means his Church of Christ denomination), and then names “a Brazilian pentecostal...a British Anglican...a Southern Baptist...[two] Presbyterian[s]...a Catholic,” plus a Nazarene, two more Baptists, and an unknown radio preacher, all of whom, he says, have made him a better Christian. He clearly implies that all of these men will “get home” to heaven with him.¹⁰ In spite of his plea that “only God can judge my neighbor,” he evidently judges that these men are all saved. Perhaps he means that we cannot use any kind of judgment that would decide, even based on the evidence of God’s Word, that anyone will be lost.

He continues to belie his claim that “only God can judge my neighbor” in the following:

First, look at the fruit. Is it good? Is it healthy? Is he or she helping or hurting people? Production is more important than pedigree. The fruit is more important than the name of the orchard. If the person is bearing fruit, be grateful! A good tree cannot produce bad fruit (see Matt. 7:17), so be thankful that God is at work in other groups than yours....The Master says examine the person’s faith. If he or she has faith in Jesus and is empowered by God, grace says that’s enough. There are some who do not work in God’s name. Remember the rock-stackers and the finger-pointers in the parable? They present a salvation of works rather than a salvation of grace. They are not working in the name of God, indeed they do not need God. They are working under the banner of human-merit self-righteousness. Just as **Paul was intolerant** of self-salvation, **we must be as well.** [emph. mine, tjc]¹¹

In spite of his previous denial, Lucado evidently believes that we can judge the “fruit” in another’s life. However, like Satan in Matthew 4:6, Lucado does not consider the full import of quoting Matthew 7:17! Seventh-Day Adventists, Mormons, and the Salvation Army possibly do more benevolent “good works,” (the way the world looks at it) than any other religious groups. Shall we say that the “good works” done by these people prove their claims of additional inspired writings besides the Bible, by people like Ellen G. White and Joseph Smith? Shall we say that the Salvation Army’s good works establish their teachings that absolutely contradict the Bible? Note: “BAPTISM AND THE LORD’S SUPPER...ARE NOT NECESSARY TO SALVATION NOR ESSENTIAL TO SPIRITUAL PROGRESS. WE DO NOT OBSERVE THEM” [Their emphases].¹²

Like the forbidden fruit in Eden, the fruit of some individuals and religious groups may **look good** and may be **desired** by those who see it, but these works have the sting of sin (cf., Gen. 3:6). Why is this so? Because benevolent works done, though necessary (Mat. 25:31-46), do not tell the whole story. Max Lucado needed to review the whole chapter in Matthew 7, particularly down to verses 21-23. Just claiming a work in Jesus' name does not make it so (v. 22). The key to all "good fruit" is whether or not the people doing the work "doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven" (v. 21). An improper attitude toward God's will and lack of knowledge of that will negates any praise from God for this so-called "good fruit." Jesus said to such, "I never knew [approved of] you" (v. 23). If a tree is not rooted in God's Word, its fruit, no matter how "good looking" it appears, is not "good" in God's view. Keep in mind that God has not planted some plants (Mat. 15:13). These will be uprooted, for they do not bear fruit approved of God.

Equally amazing is Lucado's judgment against the "rock-stackers," which he described in his parable earlier in the book. Consider his judgments against them. "They are not working in the name of God, indeed they do not need God." They are "self-righteous" and it is right to be "intolerant" of such people. Ask yourself how Max arrived at these judgments. Apparently it is all right to be "intolerant" of those whom **Max judges** to be worthy of such! Mind you, I am not saying it is wrong to make judgments which are based on the Word of God, but Max says we cannot judge, and then he judges. Truly, he shows his blanket statement against all judging to be lame by his own judgment of others. Who are these so-called rock-stacking, grace-denying, self-righteous boobs? That would be those of us who insist on the gospel plan of salvation set forth earlier in this lesson (see "Initial Fellowship") and those of us who contend that we must keep on obeying God's commandments as explained earlier in "Continuing in Fellowship." That such is the case is made even more clear by what Lucado said in one of his nationally broadcast radio sermons. After his lesson, Max invited the listening audience to become children of God simply by saying the so-called "sinner's prayer." After the prayer he made these comments.

If today is the first day you've ever prayed a prayer like that, could you do me a favor? Could you write me a letter? I don't have any-

thing I'm going to ask from you. I do have a letter I would like to send to you. I'd like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church. I want to encourage you to be baptized. I want to encourage you to read your Bible. **But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved** [emphasis mine].¹³

In denying that baptism is essential to salvation, Lucado also makes judgments against God's Word (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-5; Gal. 3:26-27; 1 Pet. 3:21). It is not surprising that Osburn and Lucado (among others) can be so judgmental **against** those of us who believe that God calls upon Christians to make judgments in the areas we previously mentioned. False teachers can hardly speak or write a paragraph without denying God's Word and contradicting themselves.

BIBLE PASSAGES RESTRICTING JUDGMENT

Matthew 7:1-5

"Judge not, that ye be not judged" is not all encompassing in its intent, as is often alleged. It does restrict judging, but not all judging. Robert H. Stein, writing about the teaching methods Christ often used says:

One means by which Jesus sought to capture the attention of his listeners was by overstating a truth in such a way that the resulting exaggeration forcefully brought home the point he was attempting to make. Such overstatement is a characteristic of Semitic speech, and we possess numerous examples of this in the Gospels....Another example...is: "Judge not, that you be not judged." (Matt. 7:1) Compare, however, Matt. 7:6, which says, "Do not give dogs what is holy; and do not throw your pearls before swine, lest they trample them under foot and turn to attack you." How can one be careful not to cast pearls before swine or not to give dogs what is holy **unless in some way one judges who the "swine" and "dogs" are?** [emphasis mine].¹⁴

Additionally, in this same chapter, one is called upon to judge which is the narrow gate (vv. 13-14), who the false prophets are in sheep's clothing (v. 15), which trees are truly bearing good fruit (vv. 16-19), and what is the will of the Father in heaven (v. 21-23). The judgment here restricted is the harsh, **hypercritical judgment** indicated by the word "mote" ("speck," NKJV) in verses 3-5, and **hypocritical judgment**, indicated by the "beam" ("plank," NJKV) in one's own eye (vv. 3-5).

John 5:22-29

These verses have reference to the conditions essential for eternal life in heaven. Verse 24 identifies this concept here by saying, “Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth my word, and believeth on him that sent me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation [judgment, ASV]; but is passed from death unto life.” Certainly no mere man has the right to **set** the standards which determine who will be saved or lost; but just as certainly no man has the right to **set aside** the standards established by Christ as to who will be saved or lost. **I do not personally judge a man to be lost just because I insist that the Bible teaches that a man cannot claim salvation until he does what the Lord said he must do!** If I preach what Christ said and remind my audience what God says one must do to be saved, I am guilty of neither harsh nor hypocritical judgment in saying that those who **do not** do so will be lost. I am not making prohibited judgments when I repeat what the Lord has said.

Romans 2:1-3, et al.

The verses in this chapter against judging, prohibit the same kind of hypocritical judgment as mentioned previously in Matthew 7:1-5. These are not blanket statements against all types of judging. Romans 1:32 is connected to the statement about judging in Romans 2:1 by the “Therefore.” The Jews could not condemn the Gentiles of Romans 1:18-32 for their sins and then turn around and do those same sins without coming under the same condemnation.

Romans 14:1-15:7

Passages like, “Who art thou that judgest another man’s servant?” (14:4) or “But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ” (14:10) have reference to matters of opinion which are indifferent, not to essential matters of faith. The “faith” mentioned in verses 1-2, 22-23 et al., is not faith in Christ nor the in the essential elements of the gospel. Faith in those passages is personal conviction or persuasion that one may or may not do certain things regarding which God is indifferent. These are matters it would be right to do or right **not** to do, depending on one’s own personal conviction and clear conscience. As seen in verses 2-3, one could either “eat all things” (including previously unclean meats), or one could “eat only herbs”

(vegetables and grains). Either way it makes no difference to God, since He has now made all foods clean (cf., 1 Tim. 4:3-5). However, neither the eater of all things nor the abstainer from meat has the right to bind his or her preference on another, and then judge the other a sinner if that person did not follow the eater's or abstainer's preference. The indifference to the "regarding of days" does not refer to the Lord's appointments on the first day of the week, which involve essential matters of faith (Heb. 10:25; Acts 20:7; 1 Cor. 11:17-34; 16:1-2). These days, which one could choose to observe or could choose not to observe, were days not presently regulated by the Lord (Rom. 14:5-6; cf., Luke 18:12, days of fasting, etc.). One could observe such days if one chose to do so, or one could refrain from such observances without any condemnation from the Lord or other Christians. It was concerning these matters of indifference that Paul said, "Let us not therefore judge one another any more" (Rom. 14:13).

Remember that this prohibition from making judgments against a brother has reference **only** to things that would be, in God's sight, right if we did them or right if we did not do them. To try to make these passages refer to matters of obligation (essentials) is to pervert Paul's teaching. **God is not indifferent regarding matters revealed as part of the gospel faith, such as the plan of salvation, the organization, work, and worship of the church, and living in holiness (moral issues).** These are not matters we are to "have to ourselves" (14:22). Present day "change agents" appeal to Romans 14 saying that we must not pass judgment on others who use instrumental music in worship, who practice other types of baptism, who are in adulterous marriages, or a whole host of other issues. However, to so contend is to abuse Paul's intent in this chapter and to ignore other passages which say we must pass judgment against others in some areas. Some Scriptures authorize or command judgment.

PASSAGES AUTHORIZING JUDGMENT

While God has restricted our right to judge others in certain situations, we also have explicit and implicit authority to pass judgment in other situations. Notice:

1. Christ rebuked those who could reason about the weather from obvious signs, but could not judge about the time of Christ's ministry. "Yea, and why even of yourselves judge ye not what is right?" (Luke 12:54-57).

2. Jesus cautioned, “Judge not according to the appearance, but judge righteous judgment” (John 7:24). One must know the facts of a situation, not what outwardly appears. More will be given on this verse later.
3. Christians are to pass judgment on the moral holiness of other Christians and to have no company with those who refuse to repent of such sins (1 Cor. 5:1-13; et al.).
4. Christians must also judge others in their spiritual faithfulness to the teaching of Christ, refusing to fellowship impenitent false teachers and practitioners. Both explicit and implicit teaching regarding such is found in Romans 16:17-18; Ephesians 5:11; Titus 3:10; 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15; 2 John 9-11, and others.
5. Because we “shall judge the world...[and] angels,” there should be “a wise man among you...that shall be able to judge between his brethren?” (1 Cor. 6:1-5).
6. The Corinthian brethren were to “judge” what Paul wrote to them in several areas (cf., 1 Cor. 10:14-15; 11:13-15, 29-32; 14:29-32, 37).

While these points demonstrate clearly that not all judging is forbidden (indeed, that some judgment is clearly commanded), let us discuss two pivotal passages which authorize and give essential guidelines to our judgments noted above.

TWO PIVOTAL PASSAGES

Judging Righteous Judgment: John 7:24

Christ’s remarks here are both a warning about the type of judgment one engages in and a command to judge (the verb is imperative mood, present tense). Our judgments must not be made strictly according to appearances, based on superficial considerations or jumping to conclusions not warranted. We must **know** the true facts before passing judgment. In Deuteronomy 13:6-18 and 17:2-7 there are some principles laid out for God’s people in establishing the guilt of those who violate God’s covenant. Although given in the Old Testament (and we admit that some matters such as stoning do not apply to us), the measures to use in establishing guilt surely apply to God’s people in any age. Note that these principles are to be taken to protect the innocent as well as to establish charges against the guilty.

First, if one is a **witness** (meaning, having firsthand knowledge) of anyone turning away from God's covenant and seeking to draw others into such sin (Deu. 13:6-7): "Thou shalt not consent unto him, nor hearken unto him; neither shall thine eye pity him, neither shalt thou spare, neither shalt thou conceal him" (v. 8). Even if those going away from God are immediate family or one's closest friend (v. 6), he has an obligation to make this apostasy known, not to "conceal" it (cf., 1 Kin. 15:9-14). **Witnesses** must make these things known to responsible leaders and stand up against those who reject God's covenant for their own ways. Discipline must be meted out to such who stray and seek to subvert the faith of others (Deu. 13:9-11). While we are not to literally stone brethren who apostatize today, they are to be "marked, avoided, reproved, and rejected" (Rom. 16:17-18; Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). Why? Such is an attempt to save the erring souls (1 Cor. 5:5), and that "all Israel [the church of today] shall hear, and fear, and shall do no more any such wickedness" (Deu. 13:11).

Second, even though a person may not be a witness with firsthand knowledge of a situation, he still has obligations to deal with erring Christians, for their sake and the church. "**If thou shalt hear** (13:12)...[if] it be told thee, and **thou hast heard of it**" (Deu. 17:4), whether by direct report or rumor, there remains a necessary process of disproving or verifying the charges. If anyone knows of such sin, leaders in the local church should be notified, and they must seriously investigate these matters. They must not just dismiss them with a wave of the hand, fearing they might upset someone. Elders, preachers, and other leading men should check out reports of apostasy, even if these are happening in other cities (13:12-18). Any leaven of sin that affects part of the body can spread to the whole (cf., 1 Cor. 5:6-8). This is especially true today when travel and communication are so easy. We are seeing the effects of this today in the "change agent" movement among us. Responsible leaders did not step up to challenge and stop the insidious work of a few prominent and popular preachers, and now much of the church is being carried away by the winds of false doctrine. College presidents were silent when these troubles began, although a couple have become vocal since retiring. Many editors of our papers were too timid to expose the sin and apostasy these men were causing; some even jumped on the change agent band-wagon. Eldershops, instead of reproving "the unfruitful works of

darkness" (Eph. 5:11), invited these men into their congregations and exposed their flocks to the apostasy of these savage wolves (Mat. 7:15; Acts 20:29-31). It is a small consolation to those of us who tried to stem the tide of this digression that a few of those mentioned above have begun to see the great dangers in what these change agents are doing. **It is too little too late!** Much of the church is gone, with many considering the church of the Lord as nothing more than one denomination among many others. We must not overreact, but we must act!

Third, what responsibilities do we have to investigate charges which we receive?

1. "Then shalt thou **inquire**,
2. and make **search**,
3. and **ask diligently**; and,
4. behold, ***if it be truth***,
5. ***and the thing certain***,

that such an abomination is wrought among you" (Deu. 13:14); then only should the proper measure of discipline be carried out against those judged guilty, whether an individual or a group (13:6, 15; 17:6).

Fourth, notice that these allegations were to be substantiated "**at the mouth of two witnesses, or three witnesses**" (17:6; cf., 19:15), which serves as a check against false witnesses, although it does not entirely rule out the possibility (cf., Deu. 5:20). *Witnesses* have firsthand knowledge of the situation; they are not merely repeating what they have heard someone else say. The fact that this requirement is repeated in several New Testament passages demonstrates God's concern for truly **establishing guilt**. Remember that our Lord was put to death without any honest and diligent inquiry into the charges false witnesses made against Him (Mat. 26:57-68; et al.). Both Christ and Paul mention the need for multiple witnesses (Mat. 18:16; 2 Cor. 13:1; 1 Tim. 5:19). Of course, if a person's own words condemn him, such as many of our self-styled change agents have done vocally and in writing, there is no need for other witnesses. Jesus said, "For by thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned" (Mat. 12:37).

Fifth, only when the charges were investigated and supported by the evidence and adequate witnesses **could the penalty of the judgment be enacted**. Christians are not authorized to stone impenitent transgressors of God's covenant, but we are to withhold fellow-

ship from them, as they are marked and rejected (cf., Rom 16:17-18; 2 John 9-11). Just as throwing the first stone was meant to deter giving false witness, the severe New Testament penalty for turning away from God and His Word (suffering withdrawal of fellowship by faithful Christians) is intended to bring the erring to repentance and halt any further apostasy by others in the church. To fail to act in a responsible manner toward these erring brethren is to strengthen their hands and to allow their sinful influence to continue unchecked. God will judge shepherds who do not feed, protect, and care for their sheep (cf., Eze. 34; Acts 20:28-32). Solomon said, "Because sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil" (Ecc. 8:11).

Brethren, I am concerned that we follow these guidelines for establishing guilt scrupulously. Our stand for the truth is made to suffer when we make unsubstantiated charges against others that are proved to be unfounded. When those of us who are truly concerned for the purity of God's Word and His church are "caught" making allegations without proper foundation, the wolves will use that against us when we do know and present facts against them. Brethren, if you do not know with certainty, **before you throw that rock, please "inquire, search, and ask diligently"** in order to arrive at the truth.

Transgressing the Doctrine of Christ: 2 John 9-11

These verses give instruction as to our attitudes and actions against those who "transgresseth [goeth onward, ASV], and abideth not in the doctrine [teaching, ASV] of Christ" (v. 9). Whoever does so transgress "hath not God" (v. 9). The verbs in this verse ("transgresseth, abideth not, abideth, hath not, and hath") are all in the present tense, meaning continuing states.¹⁵ The one who **"keeps on transgressing"** is the one who **"does not keep on abiding in the doctrine of Christ."** Because of this, he **"keeps on not having God."** Conversely, the one who "keeps on abiding in the doctrine of Christ" is the one who "keeps on having both the Father and the Son." Obviously, we must keep on having fellowship with those who keep on having fellowship with God and Christ, but how can Christians keep on fellowshiping anyone who keeps on **not** having God because he refuses to keep on abiding in the teaching of Christ? This calls for judgment in recognizing who has or has not become a Christian, and who continues to live as Christians should, according to the teaching of Christ.

Those who do not abide in the teaching of Christ may come to one's home or to the churches of faithful Christians, but John warns us, "Receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed [and give him no greeting, ASV]" (v. 10). We cannot fellowship these people with our company, give them good wishes, nor do anything that would be construed as approval, once we determine that they are not abiding in the doctrine of Christ. To do otherwise "is [to be] partaker of his evil deeds" (v. 11). "Partaker" is the same word translated "fellowship, communion, and sharing." **If one does become a partaker with these who transgress, that means that we are no longer abiding in the doctrine of Christ and that we no longer have fellowship with the Father and the Son!** That is just how serious this matter is.

Yes, God expects us to use our properly informed judgment to determine when to fellowship others. This requires at least three things: (1) knowledge of what God's Word teaches on a given matter, (2) knowledge of another's obedient acceptance or intentional rejection of such truth, and (3) drawing only the conclusions such knowledge warrants. If God and Christ have people in their fellowship, we must too. However, if people do not have fellowship with the Godhead, we cannot have fellowship with them. To give fellowship to those whom God does not acknowledge is to give them a sense that they are all right and in fellowship with God. When we do this, we have removed all motivation for them to investigate their status and seek to initially obey the gospel or to repent and be restored to being a faithful child of God.

One more question remains about 2 John 9-11. There are those who contend that "the doctrine of Christ" means the doctrine **about** Christ, referring to verse 7 which states that Jesus came "in the flesh." It is then alleged that only those who deny that Jesus came in the flesh are those who come under the condemnation of verses 9-11, whereby one can refuse such men fellowship. It is possible for the original Greek text ("the doctrine of Christ") to mean either the "doctrine about Christ" (objective), or the "doctrine Christ taught" (subjective).¹⁶ Therefore, the context of the phrase in this letter and the usage of similar phrases elsewhere in the New Testament must be one's guide.

John begins his epistle speaking of “the truth,” meaning the whole body of revealed truth taught by Christ and those whom He inspired (vv. 1-3). He talks of “walking in truth,” then “loving one another,” and defines love as walking “after his commandments” (vv. 4-6). Also remember that 1 John 5:2-3 is the forerunner of this expression, saying that

we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments. For this is the love of God [meaning the love we have for God], that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous.

Second John 7, rather than being a central focus of the letter, is more of a parenthetical thought or a warning connected with the major thought of walking in the love and truth of God’s commandments. The warning about *deceivers* in the world, who deny that Jesus has come in the flesh, is only one example of how one can be sidetracked from walking in the love and truth of God’s commands. In verse 8 John gets right back to his main thought, saying, “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.” Obviously, this means not to stray from walking “after his commandments” (v. 6), for only in continuing that walk will one “receive a full reward.” Verse 9 plays on the central thought of the continuing walk of verses 4 and 6. The King James speaks of one that *transgresseth*, which means to go aside or overstep, going out of the pathlines God has drawn (cf., Jer. 6:16). The American Standard Version says “goeth onward,” carrying the same idea of going beyond what God has marked out, refusing to *walk* as God’s commandments direct. Anyone who refuses to “walk after his commandments” transgresses or goes beyond Christ’s doctrine (teaching, ASV). This would refer to all of inspired revelation that came through Christ or those whom He inspired (cf., John 14:26; 16:12-13; Eph. 3:1-5).

As already noted, the word *doctrine* literally means “teaching.” In Matthew 16:12 the “doctrine of the Pharisees and Sadducees” is not teaching about them; rather it is the content of what they taught. In Acts 2:42 the “apostles’ doctrine” is not teaching about the apostles, but what they taught (cf., Acts 5:28). The “doctrine of the Lord” in Acts 13:12 is the same as “the word of God” (v. 7), “the faith” (v. 8), and “the right ways of the Lord” (v. 10).

John's use of this type of phrase is seen in Revelation 2:14-15. The "doctrine of Balaam" is not teaching about Balaam, but what Balaam taught Balak to do to lure Israel into sin (cf., Num. 22; 25; 31:16). The "doctrine of the Nicolaitans" was not teaching about them personally, but what they taught that some in Pergamos were holding to (cf., Rev. 2:6, "the **deeds** of the Nicolaitans").

Also, John 8:31 is a key to understanding 2 John 9. Notice the parallels.

John 8:31—If ye continue [abide] in my word,.....then are ye my disciples indeed.

2 John 9—He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ,.....he hath both the Father and the Son.

Continue in the KJV is *abide* in the ASV of John 8:31 and comes from the same word group in both passages. Clearly, 2 John 9 is speaking of all the teaching Christ gave and inspired others to give, not just that Jesus came in the flesh.

Claiming that 2 John 9 only refers to the doctrine of Jesus coming in the flesh, rather than all of Jesus' teaching, is generally done by liberals who do not want to be judged or disciplined for refusing to abide in the teaching of Christ and the apostles and prophets. We cannot, we dare not, surrender this epistle to their designs, lest we come under its judgment and lose our way and our reward.

CONCLUSION

Fellowship in our lesson has been defined as the sharing of a common spiritual relationship with other Christians who enjoy fellowship with the Godhead and receive every spiritual blessing in Christ. *Judging* which is authorized by the Scriptures means that we fully and fairly examine every situation in which we are called upon to make a pronouncement to approve or condemn a person, teaching, or activity.

Our concern is whether or not people are truly in fellowship with God, whether we speak of initially entering into that fellowship by obeying the gospel (Rom. 10:16; 2 The. 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:17), or of staying in fellowship by continuing in faith and obedience to "walk after his commandments" (2 John 4, 6; Jude 21; 2 Pet. 2:20-22).

Let us be certain that we do not practice forbidden judgments—but that we inquire and search diligently to confirm the truth of God's Word and the facts of any particular situation before we throw the

first rock. Remember also, if God's Word and the facts warrant discipline to withhold fellowship, **we do not honor God if we do not exercise the discipline required, for the good of the individuals involved, the church as a whole, and for the good of those looking in from the world.** We must "judge righteous judgment," or we become subject to others judging that we ourselves are not abiding in the "doctrine of Christ."

ENDNOTES

¹William F. Arndt and F. Wilbur Gingrich, *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1972), p. 438.

²*Ibid.*, p. 439.

³*Ibid.*, p. 451.

⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 451-452.

⁵A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures in the New Testament* (Nashville, TN: Broadman Press, 1931), 5:254.

⁶Barbara and Timothy Friberg, *Analytical Greek New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 338.

⁷*Ibid.*, p. 720.

⁸Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom: Essays Favoring Non-Sectarian Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), pp. 90-91.

⁹Max Lucado, *In The Grip Of Grace* (n.p., n.d.), p. 159.

¹⁰*Ibid.*, pp. 166-167.

¹¹*Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹²*The Salvation Army Handbook of Doctrine* (London, England: International Headquarters, 1955), p. 160.

¹³Max Lucado, "When Your Heart Needs A Father," cassette tape of radio sermon delivered December 2, 1996, over station KJAK in Lubbock, TX. The tape was provided by the East Hill Church of Christ, P.O. Box 329, Pulaski, TN 38478.

¹⁴Robert H. Stein, *The Method and Message of Jesus' Teaching* (Philadelphia, PA: The Westminster Press, 1978), pp. 8, 10.

¹⁵Friberg, pp. 732-733.

¹⁶Ron Halbrook, *The Doctrine of Christ and the Unity of the Saints* (Marion, IN: Cogdill Foundation Publications, 1977), p. 53.

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THE SERMON ON THE MOUNT AND FELLOWSHIP

Harrell Davidson



Harrell Davidson was born in Gibson County, Tennessee. He began leading singing for meetings at twelve years of age and was encouraged to preach the gospel. He attended Freed-Hardeman University, Harding University, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. He preached his first sermon in 1955 and began preaching every Sunday in October 1958. Harrell preaches in several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. He has preached in most of the 50 states and in Europe, Asia, and Africa. He has written one study book on *Marriage and The Christian Home* (out of print). Harrell is the son of a former elder and preacher. He has worked with the church in Obion, Tennessee for the past 16 years, which is only 20 miles from where he was born and raised.

Harrell is married to the former Carrielyn Spurlock and they have four children, three boys and one girl.

Some may think it strange that in the study of fellowship we would appeal to the Sermon on the Mount. Some of the most basic and fundamental doctrines of fellowship are found therein. There is some difference in Luke's record of the sermon than Matthew's. Previously we tried to put the records together and make them harmonize. This sermon is part of a continuous sermon which may have been spoken at one time and repeated over and over. It is obvious that Matthew's account and Luke's account are different. Matthew wrote nine beatitudes by inspiration while Luke was only given four. The setting is about the same, but there are some variations. Luke was inspired to give four "woes" that Matthew was not given. Luke puts the sermon in the second person while Matthew uses the third person. This leads us to the conclusion that some things are worth repeating and need repeating. At Freed-Hardeman College the late brother G. K. Wallace told us that we ought to repeat our sermons every two years. He opined that if they were not worth repeating, then we need to study and get some that were worth repeating.

The tone and tenor of either Matthew's account or Luke's sets the stage for what fellowship is all about. The disciples are to learn

lessons here that will be used when the church is established and set in order. They would pass these things along to generations that would follow them. Jesus said in John 16:13, "Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, *that* shall he speak: and he will shew you things to come." "Into all truth" would include fellowship. Then in His prayer for the apostles Jesus said, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word" (John 17:20). Notice carefully the last phrase in this verse, "for them also which shall believe on me through **their** word." Those that read this precious sermon on the mount (Matthew) or plain (Luke) are going to learn the difference between right and wrong, good and evil, and that we cannot fellowship wrong things and be right with God.

We would like to turn our attention to Luke's record of the selecting of the apostles. An inspired definition of the word *fellowship* is found in the fifth chapter of Luke. We will use this definition throughout this essay. Our Lord is teaching His disciples what fellowship is all about and how they are to maintain it in the world in which they lived. Other definitions that will be used in these lectures, based upon the original language, will show joint participation as being one of the meanings—and the one that is most often used among us. Suppose that we had no Greek guidance. Does the Bible give us an example of what fellowship means or what is involved? The answer is, yes, it does. The late brother Marshall Keeble subscribed to the view that "if it took Greek to go to heaven, he would miss it." This author heartily agrees with the great and lamented Keeble.

Two verses in Luke 5 give us the best definition of fellowship found in Holy Writ. "And they beckoned unto *their* partners, which were in the other ship, that they should come and help them. And they came, and filled both the ships, so that they began to sink" (Luke 5:7). Second, look at Luke 5:10 and you see one word used again. "And so *was* also James, and John, the sons of Zebedee, which were partners with Simon. And Jesus said unto Simon, Fear not; from henceforth thou shalt catch men." We need to underline the word **partners**. New Testament fellowship is all about being partners. In Luke 5:7 Peter beckons to his partners for help in bringing in the nets that were filled and bursting open. These partners are further identified as James and

John, the sons of Zebedee. These men are partners together. Likewise, the Lord's church is not just a "preacher thing" or an "elder thing"; we are all in this together. We are partners with each of us depending upon the other for help in the comfort and support that we may need. Likewise we yield such to those of our brothers and sisters in the Lord who need our help. Plain and simple, we are partners together in the greatest work under the sun. The sad thing is that there are so many proverbial Judases among us. By this we mean those in the kingdom who were partners but they have canceled their part of the partnership through various wrongs that they have committed. Having been duly warned, prayed with and for, we have had to withdraw our partnership with them because we can have no part with them in the error that they are espousing or in which they are living (cf., 2 The. 3:6).

It is further interesting in the selection of the apostles before the sermon under consideration that we have two brothers and others who were partners together. Andrew was a person who could see an opportunity and take advantage of it. Some people walk right over opportunities and never see them. Matthew, on the other hand, was a person that knew how to take care of wealth—money. We need people in the church today who are millionaires, hundred thousand-aires, and thousand-aires who know how to make money and use it to the glory of God. Jesus is going to take two brothers and some partners and make them into one unit. They were, for the most part, from different backgrounds other than two brothers and some who were partners in the fishing business. Jesus is going to take these men who were similar in some things and dissimilar in other things and mold them into one complete unit. Twelve men who could get along and preach the same gospel, who were from different backgrounds, and probably different educational levels, obviously had many differences. Jesus selected them because they had a variety of abilities and different personalities. This ought to remind us of the church today. We are to have elders (plural). They come from different backgrounds with different abilities. The congregation that they oversee also comes from different backgrounds and have different personalities. We see the wisdom of our Lord giving such qualifications of elders so they may represent, to the best of their abilities, the diverse backgrounds of all the people that are in the flock.

What is Jesus going to do? Make all of them partners in doing His work. It is just here that we learn one of the most basic ideas of fellowship. We come from different families, states, and countries, but through the gospel we are one together in Christ. What our occupations may or may not be has little to do with the partnership as long as our work is honest and honorable in the Lord. In the list of apostles in Luke 6 there is Judas' name. Here is a person who could have been a partner, but Judas did not know how to handle material wealth. Material possessions got the best of him. In spite of the fact that Jesus wanted to mold and make them into one unit He could not change Judas' attitude toward money.

LET'S BACK UP SO WE MAY BETTER UNDERSTAND

Jesus, in Luke 5, had entered into a conflict with the Scribes and Pharisees. The Pharisees were a self-righteous and indignant people as a whole. Likewise, self-righteousness is a very real danger today and especially among preachers. We are sorry to say so, but some of our preaching brethren think they are above the Law of God. With them we cannot have partnership.

Jesus teaches about the new wine in old skins and a new patch on an old garment. Many volumes have been written on these four verses (Luke 5:36-39). We have read some of these works and some good things have been said. Over-all we are afraid that the main point is missed. We let chapter divisions get in our way sometimes, and we lose sight of what is going on. Jesus is teaching that He did not come into the world to just patch up people's lives. Jesus came into the world because of sin sickness. Cancer, heart disease, and others are terrible problems, but the real and worst problem is sin. Jesus is saying that Christianity is not a patch to patch up the Jewish system of religion. The Pharisees misunderstood His purpose and intentions. Paul in Romans 7 said that the law was given to show the exceeding sinfulness of sin. Jesus came to make new people out of us. The word "new" here in Luke 5 has a different meaning than we normally associate with it. It means different in quality and character and serves as a contrast to the Old Testament. In 2 Corinthians 5:17 Paul said, "Therefore if any man *be* in Christ, *he is* a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new." The ASV of 1901 says new creation. The gospel makes one a new man. He is not something that is just patched up. There are fundamental changes that

must be made when we obey the gospel. Our concerns and interests are those that Jesus came and died for that we could have this partnership. The gospel has within it motivation towards obedience. We do not obey because of pressure or because Christianity is a load. It is a new life with little pressure compared to a life of sin.

“No man also having drunk old *wine* straightway desireth new: for he saith, The old is better” (Luke 5:39). This verse is directed straight as an arrow to the Pharisees. They wanted to be left alone. They enjoyed their power. They wanted to leave the status quo like it was. Don’t upset the apple cart, we might say. They wanted no one to bother them in their control over the people. This is the first application of the verse. We don’t like to change either. Sinners do not want to make changes to give up sin in order to be a Christian. The desire for the old can have an impact on us. We cannot be partners without being transformed in Christ.

This thrusts us over into the 6th chapter of Luke. The disciples gather some corn and rub it in their hands to get the grains off the cob. Now look at the Pharisees in Luke 6:2. They said: “But certain of the Pharisees said, Why do ye that which it is not lawful to do on the sabbath day?” Stop here for just a moment with me and let us think about a matter. They had placed an interpretation on the Bible that was incorrect. Look back to Deuteronomy 23:24-25:

When thou comest into thy neighbor’s vineyard, then thou mayest eat of grapes thy fill at thine own pleasure; but thou shalt not put any in thy vessel. When thou comest into thy neighbor’s standing grain, then thou mayest pluck the ears with thy hand; but thou shalt not move a sickle unto thy neighbor’s standing grain.

The law is quite clear. If the poor were passing through a vineyard, he could pick enough grapes or corn to eat. However, he was not to go and get a sickle and a pick sack and take it away with him. God was demonstrating two things. One, the responsibility that people had toward those who were poor. Second, the poor should not take undue advantage of the people who had grapes or grain. But the Scriptures did not say they could not do this on the Sabbath day as the Pharisees have now charged. They said that thou shalt not reap on the Sabbath. They said that plucking was reaping and you could not reap on the Sabbath day. They also said that rubbing the hands together was a form of threshing and this also could not be done on the Sabbath. This is also foreign to the law of Moses.

This was and is a real problem and where we have a lot of difficulty. We take certain passages of Scripture and place our interpretation on them, and then we interpret our interpretation. We add laws where God has not added, just like they did. Take for example the eating of a meal in the church building. Some people appeal to Paul's first letter to Corinth in the 11th chapter and interpret it to mean that we ought to eat in our houses and are forbidden to eat in the church building. The eleventh chapter of first Corinthians does not mention a church building. The brethren were confusing a love feast they had in the church at Corinth where the real problem was the abuse of the Lord's Supper. They could not be partners any longer. No wonder they were wearing party names. They were in a divided condition. The fact of the matter is that those who had plenty of food took of their own food and waited not for the poor who did not have sufficient to eat. It was a time to divide and share with those who had none. Now that was the problem. We must be careful that we do not allow our interpretations to lead us to ignore and overlook human needs. God never made a law that conflicted with man's needs.

THE SERMON ON THE PLAIN

While Luke's record has some of the same words, there are also some differences. Some things are fundamental to Christianity and need restating from time to time. We have failed to preach the fundamental truths. Jesus has selected twelve men, and He is now going to train them for service.

And he came down with them, and stood on a level place, and a great multitude of his disciples, and a great number of the people from all Judaea and Jerusalem, and the sea coast of Tyre and Sidon, who came to hear him, and to be healed of their diseases (Luke 6:17).

The Scriptures are pointedly clear that this was in the plain. However, remember that some things are worth repeating. Luke's audience is a different one than Matthew's; so we need to understand the difference is some of the wording. Jesus has already pointed out that the Pharisees were false teachers. Now He is going to tell the disciples the kind of lives that they are going to have to live to continue the partnership. Let us turn and look at the sermon.

And he lifted up his eyes on his disciples, and said, Blessed *be ye* poor: for yours is the kingdom of God. Blessed *are ye* that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed *are ye* that weep now: for ye shall

laugh. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you *from their company*, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy: for, behold, your reward *is* great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. Woe unto you, when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets (Luke 6:20-26).

Here are some things that they are going to have to do if they are to be successful. Here is a contrast between false and true teachers. In verse 26 the people spoke well of the false prophets. In view of this, there are some things that the disciples are going to need. They cannot be partners with false teachers. So Christ is preparing them to be different—set apart. “Blessed *be ye poor*” indicates that they had to be the right kind of people. Go back and read verses 20-23. We notice that the disciples were required to have a different attitude in their work than the self righteous Pharisees. In verses 23 and 24 there is a wrong attitude brought into focus. This is the other side of the coin. Some are interested in being popular instead of doing good. They had to understand this idea if they were going to be partners in the greatest work on this earth. When we live to get gain from others instead of giving to others, our only reward will be here in this life. There will be no eternal life in heaven for this kind of person.

JESUS WILL DEMONSTRATE HOW TO BE DIFFERENT

“But I say unto you that hear, Love your enemies, do good to them that hate you” (Luke 6:27). Not only will it be necessary for them to be different, they also are going to have to accept some things in their lives that will distinguish them from the false prophets. Notice the word *hear*. Did not all of them hear? Yes. But the word carries with it the idea of attention, application, and practice. God never intended for His truths to pass in one ear and out the other. So let us note four things: (1) Love your enemies. (2) Do good to them that hate you. (3) Bless them that curse you. (4) Pray for them that despitefully use you. Now let us read to discover what it is going to take to have this partnership together and be separate from the world.

And unto him that smiteth thee on the *one* cheek offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloke forbid not *to take thy* coat also. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask *them* not again. And as ye would that men should do to

you, do ye also to them likewise. For if ye love them which love you, what thank have ye? for sinners also love those that love them. And if ye do good to them which do good to you, what thank have ye? for sinners also do even the same. And if ye lend to *them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again (Luke 6:29-34).

Now let's go back to number one above. Love your enemies. This is not an arbitrary command. We think that this is an impossibility. We do not understand what love is. We think that love means to like someone. Love here means moral principles. God loves us not because we are likable; it is based upon the moral principle of God. Love has a moral responsibility about it. Two people are married. One of them says to the other, "I don't love you anymore." They are talking about liking each other. Love carries with it a moral responsibility.

Then look at number two above. Do good to them that hate you. That is a mouthful, is it not? We must forgive those who abuse us. We must return good for evil. The Bible is right, and we must learn to do what it says. How do we react when we are misused? How difficult is it to get down on our knees and pray for someone that has done us wrong? Even though we do not encourage the wrong, we pray for and do good to the wrongdoer.

Now look at verse 32 and see the change that must take place within this partnership. It is easy to love those that love us. The word *thank* is translated from the same word as grace. Now the question: How can I love somebody that does not love me? God's grace makes it possible to do what we ought to do and need to do. I can't do it by myself, but with God as my helper, I can do it. Therefore, I can love those that do not love me. I can love the unlovable with the help of the grace of God. Doing good to others that do not good is service to others. If I treat people the same way they treat me, then I am no better than they. Peter said, "Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings" (1 Pet. 2:1). If we cannot lay these things aside, then we are no better than those in the world. We need to get on our knees and pray for help in these matters. To react and do good to somebody who is mistreating us shows the Christian's character.

And if ye lend to *them* of whom ye hope to receive, what thank have ye? for sinners also lend to sinners, to receive as much again. But

love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great, and ye shall be the children of the Highest: for he is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil (Luke 6:34-35).

What does it take to make children of the Highest? We must obey the gospel. We change our lives. We change our directions. If we would be children of God, then we must have the right attitude toward our fellow man.

“Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful” (Luke 6:36). This means that we should be God-like. Jesus is telling these who would be partners in the greatest work under the sun, “I am training you for service.” In the next two verses Jesus gives instructions to the partners regarding judging, condemning, forgiving others, and giving (with its rewards). Next, pay particular attention to verse 39: “And he spake a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? shall they not both fall into the ditch?” What is our Lord conveying in these verses? Keep in mind the context. What causes people to be blind? You can see that the background of this passage is love or the lack of it. A lack of love causes spiritual blindness. To not be blind we must love God and His Word. We cannot love God and His Word without loving people. We cannot love God and His Word and be partners with wrong-doing. Jesus is measuring the right and wrong with the story of the mote and the beam (cf., Luke 6:41-43). The real problem in looking at other people begins with a failure to see ourselves as we really are. It is easy to measure people in the wrong way. Here is the way we do it. We take our strengths and their weaknesses and we make judgments based upon this criteria. These passages place the emphasis on self. In verse 42 Jesus uses the word *self*. What do we learn? We learn that we must be interested in examining our own lives to make sure that they are what they ought to be. When we have done that, we are in a position to help other people.

The apostle Paul gives us some valuable information regarding this concept in 2 Corinthians 10:12: “For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.” Therefore, when I select someone else to measure my life by, I am doing something that is unwise. Notice further 1 Corinthians 4:3-5:

But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

This is how Paul measured himself. In verse three he shows that it is a small thing to be judged by someone else. He said that he did not judge himself. He is indicating in verses four and five that the standard of judgement is the Word of God. This is how he judged his life. Only as we can manage our own affairs are we able to help others.

THE TREE AND THE FRUIT

“For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. For every tree is known by his own fruit. For of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble bush gather they grapes” (Luke 6:43-44). Jesus is demonstrating that these partners can expect the right kind of fruit off the right kind of bush. You don't get figs off a bramble bush. Our Lord then shows them where to begin in verse 45. The good man out of the treasure of his heart will show incorruptness. It is out of the heart that the mouth speaks. In order to bring the right kind of fruit, we must have the right kind of heart. It must begin in the heart. If the process does not start here, the result will be no good. It is out of the heart that fruits of righteousness come.

The danger is seen in verse 46. Jesus says, “And why call ye me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?” One of the real dangers is that we can let our religion be all talk and no action. It is much easier to tell children the values of life than to develop and demonstrate them. It is much easier to talk about faith than to demonstrate it. Now the apostles are ready for the final lesson in this sermon on the plain that will assist them in their partnership with each other and with Christ.

Whosoever cometh to me, and heareth my sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it: for it was founded upon a rock. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that without a foundation built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently,

and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great (Luke 6:47-49).

Here is the contrast between two people. What Jesus is talking about is the building of a life. A successful life cannot be built upon the shifting sands of selfishness. One man dug deep into the earth the other just built on the earth. The results were directly opposite. A life, to be successful, cannot be built on selfishness. Selfishness is always self-defeating. We must learn that the life that is built on the rock must be built on love to God and loyalty to Him. I must love God dearer than life itself. The only way that a congregation of the Lord's people can build itself successfully is to build upon love and loyalty to divine truth. The congregation that does not love the truth and does not build on the truth can never be successful in the sight of God. This sermon furnishes the apostles with all the principles of fellowship that will be needed.

THE APPLICATION IN THE LIVES OF THE APOSTLES

The first congregation on history's page had this kind of partnership (cf., Acts 2:42; 4:32). The apostles understood whom they should fellowship. They knew from the sermon that they could not have fellowship with Satan (cf., 1 Cor. 10:20; 2 Cor. 6:14ff). Paul understood crystal clear that the church could have no fellowship with those who were disorderly (cf., 2 The. 3:6-15). They understood that the most important thing was to maintain fellowship with God. John said, "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" (1 John 1:3). Thus, one is to also have fellowship with Christ. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). As partners they understood that they and the church would need fellowship one with another (cf., 1 John 1:7).

How were they going to accomplish having fellowship? Fellowship is maintained by walking in the light (cf., 1 John 1:7). They would practice what the Lord taught by receiving—bidding God Speed (cf., 2 John 10-11). They were taught to abide in the doctrine of Christ (cf., Mat. 28:20; 2 John 9). They taught us to have fellowship by the gospel: "That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel" (Eph. 3:6). They understood that by supporting the gospel they/we

were having fellowship as Paul said to the Philippians in chapter 1 verse 5, “For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now.” All of this fellowship was in the truth (cf., 3 John 8).

The apostles and the early churches would have to conclude that they were all partners in servitude, citizenship, sufferers together, laborers together, soldiers, and pilgrims. These attitudes were all learned in the attitudes of the beatitudes. May God help the church today to turn back to these simple and fundamental truths.

FELLOWSHIP AND SUFFERING

Johnie Scaggs, Jr.



Johnie Scaggs, Jr., was born in 1955, in Albuquerque, New Mexico. He and his wife Nancy Jean have four children: Crystal, Jared, Johnie Roy, and Stephen.

His interest in preaching started as a teenager when at the age of 14, he preached his first sermon. In 1979, Johnie began to do fill-in preaching in the surrounding area of Springfield, Missouri.

Johnie is a graduate of the Great Plains School of Biblical Studies (four-year part time school) in Lawton, Oklahoma. He was also a student of the Brown Trail School of Preaching (one year) in Hurst, Texas. He is a graduate of the Southwest School of Preaching in Austin, Texas. Johnie is a member of the board of directors for the Happy Hollow Bible Camp. He writes for several brotherhood papers and is a staff writer for the Firm Foundation. He is the editor of *The Reasoner* and has written several tracts, a booklet titled *What Do The Dead Know— Soul Sleeping, An Overview of the Book of Romans*, a book on *Christian Evidences*, and a booklet on *Lessons on the Home*. He has written a weekly column for the local newspaper and is speaker on a five-minute daily radio program. Johnie presently preaches for the Gospel Hill Church of Christ in Pottersville, Missouri.

INTRODUCTION

There is a great need in this day and age to have a proper understanding of the kind of fellowship which God demands of each child of His and how that fellowship relates to our suffering. Many good folks today are confused and have allowed their emotions to over-ride their knowledge and are now willing to fellowship anyone and everyone regardless of their fellowship with God. Many feel that one should never suffer due to his/her fellowship with others. Thus, they believe that if one is in fellowship with another and suffers because of such kind of fellowship, then they should no longer be in that type of fellowship.

We need to understand that for every action, there is a reaction. Thus, actions have consequences. Those who are in fellowship with Satan and his host of evil doers will suffer the consequences of their actions. Likewise, those who are in Christ shall suffer for the consequences of their actions. However, the one who suffers as an evil doer will continue to suffer in hell, which will be his eternal home. On the

other hand, the one who suffers for the cause of Christ shall one day rest from his suffering in a place called heaven. Therefore, all the suffering that a child of God does in the name of Christ will one day be rewarded, and he will suffer no longer.

FELLOWSHIP AND SUFFERING DEFINED

In order that we might have a clear understanding of the two words and their meanings as they relate to the overall study, let us look at the words *fellowship* and *suffer*.

Fellowship comes from

κοινωνία, and it means, “communion, fellowship, sharing in common” (from *koinos*, “common”), is translated communion in 1 Cor. 10:16; Philem. 6, R.V., “fellowship,” for KJV, “communication”; it is most frequently translated “fellowship”; (b) “that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution,” e.g., Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4.¹

Hence, we see the idea of a sharing in common.

Curtis A. Cates wrote:

It means partnership, working together agreeably, having one common goal toward which we strive in harmony together. It means peace, which is the absence of conflict (Rom. 5:1). “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Psm. 133:1). “And I do all things for the gospel’s sake, that I may be a joint partaker [partner] thereof” (1 Cor. 9:23). Think of the homogeneity involved in the fellowship of Christ-minded brother and sisters. If there is no agreement, there can be no fellowship!²

Jesus prayed that His disciples and those who came after them (i.e., Christians) would all be one. Notice His words:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

To be one with the Father and with Christ is to be in fellowship with them. Unless we enjoy the fellowship that the Father and the Son enjoy, then our fellowship is the wrong kind of fellowship. Many people have fellowship with each other, but they lack the fellowship that is a must: the fellowship with the Father.

To “suffer persecution” means:

dioko...2 b) to pursue (in a hostile manner) 3) in any way whatever to harass, trouble, molest one 3 a) to persecute 3 b) to be mistreated, suffer persecution on account of something 4) without the idea of

hostility, to run after, follow after: someone 5) metaph., to pursue 5 a) to seek after eagerly, earnestly endeavor to acquire.³

Many think that suffering is evil or bad. Many believe that if a Christian suffers, it is because of an improper attitude on his part toward someone or something. However, they fail to understand that some suffering is good. Peter said:

But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy *are ye*: and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled; But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts: and *be* ready always to *give* an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear: Having a good conscience; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ. For *it is* better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing (1 Pet. 3:14-17).

Peter also stated, "Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf" (1 Pet. 4:16).

The truth is that all men suffer. The question is not:, "Does mankind in general suffer?" Yes, we all, who live in this body, suffer. As Job said, "Yet man is born unto trouble, as the sparks fly upward" (Job 5:7). Also, he said, "Man *that is* born of a woman is of few days, and full of trouble. He cometh forth like a flower, and is cut down: he fleeth also as a shadow, and continueth not" (Job 14:1-2). What is important is: why does one suffer? Is one's suffering due to the life he lives as a Christian or is it due to the life he lives as living for the world? Due to the simple truth that we are Christians, we will suffer persecutions, distresses, and we will have many burdens. Peter said, "Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Paul told young Timothy: "Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution" (2 Tim. 3:12). Note that Paul said, "shall suffer persecution." It is not that we "might" suffer, but rather that we "shall" suffer persecution. The reason many members of the church are not suffering persecution is that they are not living godly lives. If one is not persecuted, it is time to wake up and start living for the Lord.

W. T. Hamilton said:

The reason for this added grief in life is simple, but often overlooked. Christians are in the world, but not of the world (Jno. 17:11, 14). The philosophies of the world and of righteousness are diametrically opposed (James 4:4). The world hated Christ, and will hate Christians

(John 15:18). There is no way to live at peace with the world and with Jesus. You cannot serve God and mammon (Matt. 6:24). We are at war, and are in enemy occupied territory. We are strangers and pilgrims here. Our affections are in another country (Col. 3:2). While here, a head-on clash is inevitable. Simply because one is a Christian these sufferings are added to what he normally would bear.⁴

WE SUFFER BECAUSE OUR FELLOWSHIP IS AN EXCLUSIVE FELLOWSHIP

The fellowship which the child of God enjoys is one that is very exclusive. Hence, it stands to reason that whenever something or someone is excluded from the enjoyment of what another has, they sometimes are not easy to get along with. God's people have always had this to deal with. Even during the Old Testament times, God's people were made to suffer because they were an exclusive group of people. Curtis A. Cates stated:

The fellowship of God's people is emphasized and illustrated in the Old Testament. Moses set forth blessings in the law to be pronounced from Mount Gerizim for those obedient to God, and cursings from Mount Ebal (Deut. 27:11-25). "Cursed be he that confirmeth not the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen" (Deut. 27:26). Note the oneness commanded. Note the same principle set forth in the New Testament, the one(s) who deviates from the law of Christ being accursed of God (Gal. 1:6-9).

Observe some examples of unity and its pleasantness in the Word. Upon returning from captivity, "the people gathered themselves as one man to Jerusalem" (Ezra 3:1). "...all the people gathered themselves together as one man...and they spake unto Ezra the scribe to bring the book of the Law of Moses which Jehovah had commanded to Israel" (Neh. 8:1, 8). "...we are brethren," Abraham told Lot (Gen. 13:8).⁵

Notice what Moses wrote, "Cursed *be* he that confirmeth not *all* the words of this law to do them" (Deu. 27:26). They had to conform to a set of laws and in so doing they became involved in an exclusive group of people, thus causing others to look upon them in an unfavorable light and bring persecution upon them. When Moses killed the Egyptian (Exo. 2:11-12), he made a decision to become involved in an exclusive group of people. The Hebrews writer said, "Choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season" (Heb. 11:25).

Noah and his family suffered much because of their exclusiveness. Abraham and his family suffered due to their exclusiveness. In short,

all of God's people, who chose to stand firm in their relationship to God suffered because of their stand. The faithful prophets of old suffered persecution because of their firm stand for truth. We should be happy to suffer with them. We are told that Enoch walked with God (Gen. 5:24). Not much is said about Enoch—but yet enough to know that Enoch was in fellowship with God, and thus implying that he was in an exclusive group.

Like those of old, our fellowship is also exclusive and because of this we will suffer persecution. Those in the early church suffered due to their exclusiveness. All of the apostles, save John the beloved, died horrible deaths, and they all, including John, suffered many things for the cause of Christ. Paul when writing to young Timothy said, "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10). He also said:

For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day (2 Tim. 1:12).

When writing to the brethren at Corinth, Paul told them of the things which he himself had suffered because of the fellowship which he had been added to (2 Cor. 11:23-31).

When people become children of God, by being baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Gal. 3:26-27), they are added to the church of our Lord, the church of Christ (Acts 2:47). In so doing, they have been added to an exclusive group of people called Christians. They have been added to a "chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9). Yes, we are an exclusive group of people, who believe and teach things that many people will not like. And because they do not like what we stand for, they will persecute us to the ends of the world. David wrote, "Have mercy upon me, O LORD; consider my trouble *which I suffer* of them that hate me, thou that liftest me up from the gates of death" (Psa. 9:13).

WE SUFFER BECAUSE OUR FELLOWSHIP DISPELS DARKNESS

Jesus came to this world to dispel the darkness. Jesus said that He was the light of the world. Matthew recorded:

The people which sat in darkness saw great light; and to them which sat in the region and shadow of death light is sprung up. From that time Jesus began to preach, and to say, Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand (Mat. 4:16-17).

The reason we are in the kingdom of God is to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ, (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 8:4, etc.). Peter said that we should “shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Pet. 2:9). When Zacharias was telling the people about the work which his son (John the baptizer) was to do, he stated it in this fashion: “To give light to them that sit in darkness and *in* the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace” (Luke 1:79).

John wrote about Jesus and said, “And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not” (John 1:5). Men of the world do not like the light; they prefer to wallow in darkness. Whenever we, who hold forth the light, try to show them that it is the light which will save their souls, they will many times rebel, speak evil against it, even to the point at times of causing pain and suffering upon those who hold forth the light. Jesus noted:

And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil. For every one that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light, lest his deeds should be reprov'd. But he that doeth truth cometh to the light, that his deeds may be made manifest, that they are wrought in God (John 3:19-21).

The denominations around about us will persecute us if we stand firmly for the truth. Worldly church members will persecute us when we speak against worldly things. When we teach how they should dress, how they should speak, about places they should not be, they will not like it. They will speak evil of us at every opportunity they are given. Our own kinfolk will not like us and will turn against us because of our devotion to Christ (Mat. 10:34-39).

When we point out to others what the liberals of the church are really all about, the liberal minded folks will not like it, and those who are sympathetic toward their cause will not like what we have to

say. They both will persecute us because they do not like to be seen for what they truly are: “When they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds *they are* without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots” (Jude 12). The liberals do not like others to see that their true agenda is to bring us under the one big umbrella of sectarianism. They do not love the church of our Lord and they are doing, and will continue to do, everything they can to persecute the true believers. Whenever we point out error and hypocrisy in the lives of others, they will persecute us to the ends of the world. But, they need to understand, as we also need to understand, that it is the truth that will set them free (John 8:32). Another so-called-gospel will **not** set them free (Gal. 1:6-9). It is the one faith of Ephesians 4:5 that will give eternal life and set men free, and this is what we are to preach (the one faith). Do not be ashamed of it, for it is God’s power to save a lost and dying world (Rom. 1:16).

As long as we are marching for the Master, as long as we are fighting the good fight of faith, we are going to suffer because we are the light through which Jesus is seen in the world. It is because the light shines and exposes the evil for all to see and understand that the darkness will hate us and do all kinds of evil unto us. We must not, we cannot stop. We (as Paul) must continue with the fight so we can one day say with Paul:

I have fought a good fight, I have finished *my* course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

Regardless of what others may say or do to us, we must never compromise with the truth. We are duty-bound to preach the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). We should be ready to die for the faith, if need be!

WE SUFFER BECAUSE OF THE FELLOWSHIP WE HAVE WITH THE FATHER

When one obeys the Word of the Lord, he becomes a child of God. He has the right to call upon God as his Father. John wrote, “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” (1 John 1:3). No one else in all the world has this unique relationship of a Father-son relationship. It belongs only to baptized believers.

Paul wrote, “And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with *him*, that we may be also glorified together” (Rom 8:17). Because we are the children of God, because He is our Father, we must also suffer as did His Son, Jesus Christ. The only way we can be glorified together is to suffer together.

We should also understand that not only do we suffer because of our fellowship with the Father, but it is also because of our fellowship with the Father that we are delivered from the evil one (Psa. 9:13; 34:10; 55:22; Pro. 10:3).

WE SUFFER BECAUSE OUR MASTER SUFFERED

Why do some think it strange that we should suffer? If the One whom we follow after (the One we would die for—the One we have devoted our life to) suffered, why do some think it wrong for us to suffer? Do we think the servant to be greater than his Lord? They persecuted our Lord and they will persecute us (John 15:20). We must suffer with our persecution that we might be the better (1 Cor. 4:10-14).

Our Lord suffered many things at the hands of the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others of His day. They did not like the things He had to say and would have destroyed Him if they could (Mat. 12:14; 26:3-5; etc.). His death on the cross was a direct result of the fact that the Pharisees, Sadducees, and others of that day could not and would not listen and obey His teachings. They despised Him and were offended by Him to such a degree that though they could not find one thing wrong with Him from a legal point, they still hung Him on a cross (Mat. 26; 27). Yes, Jesus the Master suffered many things. “And he began to teach them, that the Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and *of* the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again” (Mark 8:31).

Peter wrote:

Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ’s sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy. If ye

be reproached for the name of Christ, happy *are ye*; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you: on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or *as* a thief, or *as* an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters. Yet if *any man suffer* as a Christian, let him not be ashamed; but let him glorify God on this behalf (1 Pet. 4:12-16).

We should be glad to suffer as a Christian. It should cause us great joy to know that we are partakers of the suffering of Christ.

CONCLUSION

To say that all of mankind suffers is to say that which is commonly known. To answer the question of why mankind suffers and to understand the consequences of his suffering is not so common. If one suffers in this world for the cause of Satan, then his reward awaits him—eternal damnation (Rev. 20:12-15). But, if one suffers as a Christian, then an eternal home in heaven awaits him. The difference, is that the suffering of those of the world will continue while the Christian's suffering is but for a short time: while on this earth. In eternity, he will suffer no longer (Rev. 21:1-4).

Though all men may forsake us, let us say with Paul, "Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me; that by me the preaching might be fully known" (2 Tim. 4:17).

ENDNOTES

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FELLOWSHIP AND THE RESTORATION MOVEMENT

Randy L. Mabe



Randy L. Mabe was born in Nashville, Tennessee, in January, 1951. He is married to the former Sharon M. Rebmann, of Scio, Oregon. They have two children: Lewis and Jennifer.

Randy received his formal Bible training through Alabama School of Religion (now Southern Christian University) and the Madisonville College of the Bible. In the last nineteen years Randy has been the pulpit preacher for congregations in Tennessee, Kentucky, and Nevada. He has been used in gospel meetings and lectureships in Idaho, Montana, California, New Mexico, Oregon, and Florida. Randy taught in the College of the Bible, Madisonville, Kentucky, under Joseph Meador, Academic

Director. He is currently in his fifth year as minister for the Boulevard Church of Christ and the Academic Director for the Southwestern School of Religion, Las Vegas, Nevada.

“Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). Fellowship among saints is sweet and is to be greatly desired. Oftentimes it is appreciated most when it is in short supply. I miss the fellowship of faithful gospel preachers in Las Vegas, Nevada. There are a precious few there and it is a five-hour drive before finding others! When living among many faithful preachers I enjoyed the fellowship. Now, living among so few, I relish and appreciate that sweet fellowship. So it was in that period of time we call the Restoration Movement.

There is a danger in pursuing fellowship in a barren land. The temptation would be to establish fellowship while ignoring doctrinal error, whether in word or deed. This danger would result in the destruction of one’s own soul as well as hindering a mission of the church in maintaining the doctrine of Christ. People are always searching for the truth of God. If that beacon of truth does not shine forth in precept and practice, what will be the end of these searchers? The false fellowship thus created dims the beacon and detours the searchers into the byways of errors condoned.

The barren land of the Restoration Movement consisted of European landscapes and wild western frontiers such as Ohio and Kentucky filled with searchers for God's truth passing through denominationalism. How could fellowship be extended profitably? One must keep firmly in mind that in this transitory setting all were casting off baggage of apostasy as they were restoring the church in doctrine and practice. Of course each was traveling at a different speed as they journeyed to the goal. They were not living upon as rich a heritage of scholarship as we enjoy of their labors. Therefore, we find associations and fellowship that, on the surface, might make us a bit uncomfortable at times.

The premise upon which they sought this sweet fellowship was unflawed. This premise of fellowship was the New Testament! On this there could be no compromise. In the course of this journey statements would be made and adopted as slogans of encouragement to the grand goal of unity of all believers. "Where the Bible speaks, we speak; where the Bible is silent, we are silent; call Bible things by Bible names; do Bible things in Bible ways" could be seen as a fire scorching across a prairie. "No creed but Christ; No law but the Lord's; No book but the Bible; No name but the Master's" was the wind filling the sails of the movement restoring the New Testament church. The changes of religious practices and doctrines held dear were legion, but to the New Testament the searchers came. They came because it was held high for all to see the light. That light was Christ, not blurred or dimmed by traditions of men, a beacon shining across the earth and into the hearts of truth seekers. We also appreciate the fact that those holding it up were having to find it themselves, at the same time they bore responsibility for blazing the trail for all to follow. As they did so, future generations would be the heirs of their labors, inheriting a well defined and traveled pathway to the highway of Holiness. We are well blessed by their labors.

This great movement was, and continues to be, a continual search for the truth of God. The greatest task for every individual was not in reading the truth, but in dividing it from opinions and human traditions. Never were people required to give up any truth that was held. They were taught, encouraged, admonished, and led to give up their opinions. Many would see that opinions of men divide while the truth of God unites. These would readily give up things proven to be opin-

ions and accept, and incorporate, things proven to be of God. Others were left behind! If a practice or teaching was not mandated by the Word of God, it was to be destroyed, left behind. If the practice of opinion prevailed, then the practitioners were left behind. It was fully realized that only individual study and independent, private judgment would allow people to move quickly and freely to unity based upon the scriptures. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth” (2 Tim. 2:15).

From Europe to America, from the Twelfth Century to today we can hear the clarion call of “Back to the Bible”! In 12th century France Peter Waldo led a group with the idea of returning to the pure teachings of the Scriptures. In their sermons they said: “Whatever was not enjoined in scriptures must be rejected” and “The Bible is the only safe guide in religion.”¹ In the 14th century, in Italy, Marsilius taught that the only authority in the church is Scripture. He maintained that the final seat of authority was the New Testament. John Wycliffe was a priest in the Catholic Church but upheld the Scriptures as the law in the church. Wycliffe, the Morning Star of the Reformation, prescribed a method of Bible study:

It shall greatly help ye to understand Scripture, If thou mark not only what is spoken or wrytten, but of whom, and to whom, with what words, at what time, where, to what intent, with what circumstances, considering what goeth before, and what followeth.²

In the 15th century John Huss of Bohemia was charged with heresy for maintaining that Christ was the head of the church and not the Pope! The 16th century brought Martin Luther advocating freedom of study and thought. Every man was to read and judge the Scriptures for himself. The Pope had no part nor lot in the matter. In the 17th century William Chittingworth of England taught that God only required of men: to believe the Scripture to be His Word, to endeavor to find the true sense of it, to live according to it. In the 18th century Rice Haggard stood with New Testament in hand and said:

Brethren, this is a sufficient rule of faith and practice, and by it we are told that the disciples were called Christians, and I move that henceforth and forever the followers of Christ be known as Christians simply.³

This was the new direction given to the 6,000 comprising the “O’Kelly secession” from the Methodist Conference. Then the explo-

sion of those deep studying, clear thinking restorationists such as Barton Stone, Thomas and Alexander Campbell, John Smith, Walter Scott and a veritable host would continue to extend the clarion creed of Christ by holding high the Word of God.

Creeds were clearly recognized to be human platforms, mere opinions of men that divided truth-seekers. Creeds were the enemy to Christian union and became the enemy of these great warriors of God. They would first appeal to preachers of the sects hoping to quickly convince them by the Holy Scriptures that creeds must be discarded and that unity must be gained on the Bible. To their dismay these sectarian preachers became the bitterest opponents. Spiritual battles were fought for every inch of gain. Creeds and those who upheld them in the face of truth were held as apostates, clearly defined. Barton Stone preached that the Bible alone is truth and, "Our union commenced upon this ground, and sectarianism first received its deadly wound from this weapon, and by no other will it die the death, if its death is to be effected by moral means."⁴ Walter Scott illustrated Protestant sects as a group of girls in the sulks, standing with their fingers in their mouths rejecting all improvements.⁵ Alexander Campbell wrote:

Our plea has been and still is, Burn all the creeds in Cristendom—abandon all their technical phrases—forget, as soon as possible, all that was ever learned from them—take the Book that God endited, the Creed which he inspired, and read, study, and practise it in the spirit of Christ, in meekness, humility, and love; and then all christians must necessarily come together, because the walls and curtains of division would then be burned up. The more creeds the more parties. Let us have no *human* creed, in its ecclesiastic sense, and then we can have no sect, not so much as one Presbyterian from Nova Zembla to the Cape of Good Hope—from the head of the Ganges to the mouth of the Origon.⁶

In answer to the question, "Do you place all sects in the apostacy?" Alexander Campbell responded:

Yes all religious sects who have any human bond of union; all who rally under any articles of confederation other than the apostle's doctrine, and who refuse to yield all homage to the ancient order of things.⁷

His reply to another question, "What are the sins of the sects?" was, "Thus the sins of the sects are not only the sins which they as sects

commit, but their very existence is a sin.”⁸ This agrees with the apostle Paul:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Denominationalism has always been sinful.

The right to individual study and private judgment was held dear. The pioneers of the restoration movement could well feel the heat of the oppressive fire of past Catholicism when

the church was a unit....It was the unity of the graveyard where all the heads and feet were turned in the same direction. The leaders told the people what they were to believe and do. The people were not supposed to be capable of doing any thinking for themselves. One man was asked what he believed; he said he believed what the priest believed. When asked what the priest believed; he said he believed what the church believed. And when asked what the church believed; he said they both believed the same thing. There is room for thought and for opinion; the truth is we cannot be true to Christ and permit others to think for us.⁹

The key to the place of opinion was found in the analogy of private property in contrast to public domain. Opinions are not doctrine and must not be taught nor made tests of fellowship. They must be held as private property. The truth of God is public domain and must be preached in its entirety and to all. It must be defended and by it fellowship must be found and maintained or broken. They upheld the standard Jesus set, “But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men” (Mat. 15:9).

It is evident that the restoration movement was consistent in its position concerning churches built upon human creeds in relation to the creeds themselves. Barton Stone observes:

These human constituted bodies must be dissolved before they become the one body of Christ, and drink into the one Spirit. They must cast away their various faiths, and receive the one faith of Christ. They must relinquish their vain philosophy respecting the Father and the Son, and learn the truth from the great Teacher.¹⁰

Benjamin Franklin’s preaching was on this wise:

To be in the kingdom or church, we must know what it is. How shall we, then, identify the church or kingdom of Christ? I lay down the following points for consideration: 1) A body, or community, not built on the foundation which God laid, is not the community which

the Lord calls “my church” {1 Cor. 3:11}. 2) A community not founded and established in the right place, is not the church of Christ {Isa.2:2}. 3) A community not founded at the right time is not the kingdom of Christ {Dan. 2:44}. 4) No church can be the true church not founded by the proper persons, Christ and the apostles {Eph. 2:20}. 5) A kingdom with any other law than the one given by the Head of the church, is not the kingdom of Christ {John 14:15}. 6) Any community labeled with a foreign name, or a name not found to designate the body of Christ, in the New Testament, is not the kingdom of God. A failure at any one of these points is fatal to the claims of any body professing to be the body of Christ.¹¹

We should, as Barton Stone, be in prayer daily for the union of all Christians, upon the basis of truth, work for it and wait with expectation for God to effect it.

Much of the work of the reformation and restoration movements were grounded in first principles—these being laid upon in discovery and then disclosure. The limits of fellowship would continue to be defined as progress was made in the gospel. Barton Stone observed wisely and correctly that the progress gained would be lost, or die, if the movement was hindered by continuing only in first principles. He had listened to the writer of Hebrews admonish stagnation in infancy and observed the answer in leaving first principles to “go on unto perfection” (Heb. 6:1). Stone said:

There has been more labor expended in reaping down the harvest, than in preserving it when reaped—There has been more care to lengthen the cords, than to strengthen the stakes (of Zion)—more zeal to proselyte, than to build up in the faith and hope of the gospel.¹²

It is always most distressing to those who have fought the battles and endured as a good soldier to see ground gained come into jeopardy. They want to immediately protect it, especially when the souls of men are at stake in the war of good and evil. So let us listen to sage advice:

We felt it therefore to be our duty to expose this error, and hold up the truth in regard to this important question. But now that the battle has been fought and the victory, to a great extent, won—that thousands upon thousands of converts have been made, many of whom are dying for want of the wholesome and strengthening provisions of the gospel—our teachers still harp upon first principles. The young preachers who came in among us in the midst of this conflict, entered with great spirit and ardor into the war, and having distinguished themselves in this warfare, in regard to first principles, and knowing little else, they seem unprepared and quite indisposed to change their course. But it is my deliberate judgment, if we would not convert our

victory into the most overwhelming defeat, we must leave, measurably, the first principles, and “go on unto perfection.” We must build ourselves up on our most holy faith, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. In the strength of the Lord we have gained much ground, but if we would not lose our reward we must carefully and diligently cultivate it. Let us study practical Christianity, under Christ, as we have studied first principles—let us pray for greater measures of the Spirit, to help us, and the stakes of Zion will be as strong as her cords are long.¹³

With the implementation of this advice comes maturity. With this maturity in the doctrine of Christ comes, of necessity, a limiting of the parameters of fellowship. That which is not of the light is darkness, and we are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness” (Eph. 5:11). Brethren, let us not lose the ground gained in the great battles that have been waged by stalwart soldiers of the Scriptures in times past. Rather let us progress, continue to find and maintain unity based upon truth. Let us find fellowship that does not betray our very battle cry, passed on to us by the apostles through these great lovers of truth.

This illustration from the turn of the twentieth century will well describe how easy it is to lose this ground of truth by sound brethren trying to combat error while having fellowship with its practitioners. J. W. McGarvey lived between the dates of March 1, 1829, and October 6, 1911. He was a giant in the field of biblical scholarship though often called “little Mac” for his stature. The *London Times* said: “In all probability, John W. McGarvey is the ripest Bible scholar on earth.”¹⁴ In regards to his ability as a Bible teacher, it is stated:

When called to meet his Master he could safely say: “I never weakened the faith of any young man entrusted to me; I never poisoned a single soul with doubt; my work as a teacher has been constructive, not destructive.”¹⁵

James A Harding loved McGarvey and had a profound respect for him. Yet he watched him combat liberalism while staying in close association with practitioners of liberalism.

Harding was sure that McGarvey’s toleration of these evils had influenced his colleagues, Moses E. Lard, I. B. Grubbs, and Robert Graham to do the same. If he had been less lenient, “maybe there would be a different story now,” Harding mused.¹⁶

In 1902, McGarvey made the following statement to J.P. Sewell:

You are on the right road, and whatever you do don't let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshiping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I have never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinctions between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today. It won't work.¹⁷

Brethren, let's not continue the same mistake today!

Elders and preachers need to recognize their work and influence and use it to the glory of God in keeping the church pure and free from apostasy. Many today hear the sound of cannon fire but are nervous and confused, not knowing where the battle line is drawn. They are unstable, double minded, wavering, tossed to and fro by being called unto those traitor preachers of the modern digression and retrieved momentarily by the faithful guard of the gospel.

And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:16-17).

Faithful elders and preachers must define the battle line of truth. Elders must mark and avoid false teachers (Rom. 16:17-18) that have gone out from us (1 John 2:19), refrain from using these false teachers, and clearly state the cause. Preachers must preach the old, Jerusalem gospel (Jer. 6:16; 2 Tim. 4:2), uniting with other stalwarts finding strength thereby.

The disposition and attitude of those seeking unity based on truth is to be conducive to this end; else we muddy our own battlefield and create mountains up which we must then scale for the fight. While peace and unity were in the mind and disposition of our Savior, controversy was all around Him, yet because of it He never shirked duty. So it was with the restorers we have studied. Barton Stone describes true gentleness:

True gentleness is founded on a sense of what we owe to Him who made us, and to the common nature of which we all share. It arises

from reflecting upon our failings and wants; and from just views of the condition and duty of man. It is native feeling, heightened and improved by principle. It is the heart which easily relents; which feels for everything that is human; and is backward and slow to inflict the least wound. It is affable in its address, and mild in its demeanor; ever ready to oblige, and willing to be obliged by others; breathing habitual kindness toward friends, courtesy to strangers, long-suffering to enemies. It exercises authority with moderation; administers reproofs with tenderness; confers favor with ease and modesty. It is unassuming in opinion, and temperate in zeal. It contends not eagerly about trifles; slow to contradict, and still slower to blame; but prompt to allay dissension and restore peace. It delights above all things to alleviate distress, and if it cannot dry up the falling tear, to soothe, at least, the grieving heart. It seeks to please, rather than to shine and dazzle; and conceals with care that superiority, either of talents or rank, which is oppressive to those beneath it. In a word, it is that spirit, and that tenor of manners which the gospel of Christ enjoins, when it commands us to bear one another's burdens; to rejoice with those who rejoice, and to weep with those who weep; to please everyone his neighbor for his good; to be kind and tenderhearted; to be pitiful and courteous; to support the weak, and to be patient towards all men.¹⁸

Stone applied this truth to his own life and was indeed a gentle, meek, and quiet spirit. "He has been represented as fond of controversy—a man of war from his youth up."¹⁹ Why? Because he never shirked his heartfelt, Bible taught duty of upholding the truth of God in the face of error!

Not from a love of controversy then, did the venerable Stone engage in, but from a sense of duty to God—to the church—to the world; from the love of truth, and an ardent desire to bring about universal union and peace.²⁰

Alexander Campbell concurs saying that many would not permit their names to be mentioned. One such said, "If the Lord will forgive me all my mistakes and errors in pleading the cause of reform, I shall be perfectly satisfied, and esteem myself most happy in having essayed to do good."²¹

Each reader is encouraged to reflect upon the glorious church, the pillar and ground of the truth, the great apostasy that took place at the hands of men, the reforming period that moved toward the light, the restoration period that clearly defined the ancient truths of the ancient church, and these words of Alexander Campbell:

Let us, then, every man to his post, do the work of the Lord faithfully, and leave it to others to tell of it; or rather, let us wait the day when every man shall have his praise from God, who judges not after the manner of men, and who will most certainly render to every man his proper reward.²²

Brethren, there is much to do—be active and faithful. And above all else—while we may study the restoration movement in all of its details, preachers, and leaders—remember that the church was established in Jerusalem by Christ, and fellowship must be established and maintained upon the truth of the doctrine of Christ and His apostles—no movement or men intervening.

ENDNOTES

¹J. M. Powell, *The Cause We Plead A Story of the Restoration Movement* (Nashville, TN: 20th Century Christian, 1987), p. 16.

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³*Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁴F. L. Rowe, *Pioneer Sermons and Addresses* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1908), p. 151.

⁵Walter Scott, *The Death of Christ* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1853), p. 95.

⁶Alexander Campbell, *Millennial Harbinger* (Rosemead, CA: The Old Paths Book Club), 5:594.

⁷Campbell, 3:362.

⁸*Ibid.*, p. 363.

⁹Archibald McLean, *Where The Book Speaks* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1907), p. 233.

¹⁰Rowe, p. 161.

¹¹*Ibid.*, pp. 260 - 261.

¹²Barton W. Stone, *The Biography of Barton Warren Stone*, ed. John Rogers (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1847), p. 94.

¹³*Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁴M. M. Davis, *Restoration Movement of the Nineteenth Century* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1913), p. 233.

¹⁵*Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁶Earl Irvin West, *The Search For The Ancient Order* (Indianapolis, IN: Religious Book Service, 1979), pp. 50-51.

¹⁷Printed in a bulletin with credit to *Biographical Sketches of Restoration Preachers*, in a lecture given by J. P. Sewell, *The Hebron Herald* (October 1997), 16:4.

¹⁸Stone, pp. 251-252.

¹⁹*Ibid.*, p. 252.

²⁰*Ibid.*, p. 253.

²¹Campbell, 4:95.

²²*Ibid.*, p. 95.

THE FUTURE OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE LORD'S CHURCH

Bobby Liddell



Bobby Liddell, a native of Birmingham, Alabama, has received his education at Walker College, University of Alabama, Memphis School of Preaching, and Southern Christian University. He has preached locally in Alabama, Florida, and Tennessee, and has spoken in lectures and meetings, and on radio and TV in the states, as well as in missionary trips overseas. He is past Editor of *Defender* and *The Beacon*, past Assistant Editor of *The Christian Sentinel*, is on the Advisory Staff of *Firm Foundation*, and is a staff writer for *The Reasoner*. From 1989 to 1994 he directed the Bellview Lectures, Pensacola, Florida, and edited the Annual Bellview Lectureship Books.

Bobby currently preaches for the Merton Street Church of Christ, Memphis, Tennessee. He also serves as Dean of Admissions and Instructor with the Memphis School of Preaching. He is married to the former Joan Loe of Adamsville, Alabama, and they have three children: Anthony Allen, Nathan Gant, and Keri Jayne.

COMMENDATION

This writer is happy to commend the Bellview Church of Christ as a faithful congregation of God's people, made up of dedicated, hard-working Christians, overseen by courageous, godly elders, and well served by a staunch and stalwart soldier in the Lord's army, Michael Hatcher. One of the great works, of the many in which Bellview is involved, is the annual lectureship. From it has sounded out the Word of the Lord, as Paul said of the brethren at Thessalonica: "For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing" (1 The. 1:8). We are thankful the Bellview bishops have continued this great work, knowing the time, energy, and expense involved in having such a lectureship as this, but also knowing the tremendous good done, and the great and lasting effects upon the brotherhood, and upon all who will hear these speeches, listen to and/or view the tapes, or read the lectureship book. We join with brethren around the world who thank God for this good church and for its many and lasting good works.

INTRODUCTION

What is the future of fellowship in the Lord's church? In the very beginning, this writer frankly acknowledges having no ability to foresee what will happen in the future. None of us has the sure knowledge of even having another heartbeat (Heb. 9:27), nor do we know how long time shall continue and this earth shall stand (Mat. 24:36; 2 Pet. 3:9-11). However, we wonder, and we are very much interested in the answer to this question. Wise men and women certainly want the best for the present, and for the future, and understand there must be preparation and planning now for that which is to come. Therefore, faithful children of God want fellowship, in the Lord's church, in our day, to be all God intended, knowing we cannot be satisfied with anything less, and also knowing, in the future, we and others will build upon that which we do today. Upon what shall we and they build—a solid foundation, or a pile of rubble? Thus, we share a sober concern, knowing the prevalence of problems which work against such fellowship, afraid that, in the face of opposition and disappointment, brethren may become discouraged. As a result, brethren may lose sight of the benefits, and lose the focus of zealous desire which we all must have to maintain this blessed privilege of wonderful fellowship, and to fulfill our responsibility in so doing.

In this chapter, we shall seek to give a brief view of the situations in the recent past and present, to examine trends, to investigate problems and possible solutions, and to encourage all God's people to be more involved in actively and aggressively pursuing fellowship with one another. Please note: We understand God has limited who may have fellowship with Him and that only those in fellowship with Him are those with whom His people may have fellowship. All those, but only those, who walk in the light are those with whom we, if we would walk in the light, may have fellowship.

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....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. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we

say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us (1 John 1:3, 6-10).

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11).

Other chapters will explore this aspect of fellowship in much greater detail, yet it is important that we state this point in the beginning, that we start off on the right foot, and that none have reason to question the motivation behind what is set forth herein. We must seek to have fellowship with all with whom we should have fellowship, but we must not extend fellowship to any with whom we should not.

What is fellowship? Fellowship, by definition of the Greek word *koinonia*, means to have fellowship with, communion, association, communicate with, have joint participation, share, or be a partaker. Indicated by these words is a close relationship. Demanded by them is a loving, giving, reciprocal relationship. Fellowship should mean something to us! When possessed, it should be sweet, satisfying, and guarded because of its value. When lost, it should be that we are saddened and that we should desire its return as soon as possible.

Our concerns for the future of fellowship in the Lord’s church are these: (1) there is, on the part of some, an effort to have fellowship with those who do not have fellowship with God; and (2) there is, too often, not enough effort (on the part of some who are in fellowship with God) to have fellowship with one another. In other words, some brethren are ready to have fellowship with almost anyone who claims to be religious, regardless of how remote his relationship with God may be. Others are ready to withdraw fellowship from almost anyone, regardless of how close his relationship with God may be. Both situations are equally offensive, and destructive to the church as God would have it to be.

THE SITUATION IN THE RECENT PAST

It has been my privilege, on two different occasions in the past, to work with congregations where there were forty to fifty other congregations in one county, a relatively small geographically bounded area. All of the congregations in these areas, with the exception of only a couple who were “anti” in their persuasion and who had withdrawn fellowship from the others, were in fellowship with all the other churches of Christ in the county. We rejoiced to get together whenever we could to support one another in efforts to reach the lost with

the gospel and to edify the saved. Gospel meetings were great occasions, anticipated as times of reunion as well as times of revival. Area singings were well attended, oftentimes overflowing the capacity of the building, and the singing was wonderful. Youth activities were often attended by so many different congregations bringing so many young people that we had problems just getting into one building; we could meet in only the largest of the church buildings. While it was not Utopia (an ideally perfect state) the great majority of preachers, elders, and members were in harmony, encouraging and uplifting one another, praying for each other, loving and showing that love for one another. Surely, this kind of enthusiastic helpfulness is what God desires.

We supported one another, joining together in a number of good works, such as radio and television programs, or putting out printed material. For example, in one place several congregations worked together to write, print, fold, stuff, and mail more than 15,000 copies each month, of a paper designed to evangelize our neighbors. It went into every home in the county and even into surrounding counties. Anyone who has ever done the hands-on work of publishing knows just how very much is involved in putting out so many copies on such a regular basis. Brethren shared the cost and the work, as well as handling the monthly problems and toiling together; we were happy to do so. Not only was there much good done for the kingdom of God, the gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16) was preached lovingly and plainly to thousands, and there were also friendships with brethren which were forged for eternity.

By working together, visiting one another, supporting one another, brethren got to know one another on a first name basis. We learned about the problems, and wept with those who wept. We knew about the victories, and rejoiced with those who rejoiced (Rom. 12:15). In the paper we put out together, we featured a different congregation each month, giving a brief history of it, and telling of its current works. We were happy to recommend sister churches to our neighbors, and were glad we could do so and be true to our Father. The family of God (1 Tim. 3:15) was indeed a family in which brothers and sisters treated one another as brothers and sisters, for we loved and appreciated each other. We were ready to fight for each other, and did so when necessary. We knew we could count on one another and

that we would not be left out on a limb while some other “brother” sawed as hard as he could to cut it off. If one were attacked unjustly, all rallied to his defense, and the folks in the area soon learned we would stand together. While other situations of cooperation and joint participation might be noted, due to limits of space, suffice it to say this: in these churches, Christians were happy to be with one another, to work with one another, and to promote one another. Lest the reader dismiss these glowing commendations as the result of a convenient “forgetter,” a manifestation of the onset of senility, or as another somewhat exaggerated tale of “the good ole days,” be it known that in the recent past such situations among brethren were not the exception, but the rule.

Some might wonder, “How could this be?” Thankfully, at that time some of the problems (from within and without) had not reared their heads. Generally speaking, brethren were cautious but not cynical or paranoid. Unfounded suspicion was not allowed to prevent our fellowship. The satanic tool of evil surmisings (1 Tim. 6:4) did not stand in our way of encouraging one another. Malicious rumors and false reports were few, and were quickly discounted as such. Envy and jealousy among brethren were limited in their effects on our communion. On the other hand, there had not at this time arisen on a large scale, within the elderships and in the pulpits, those who were seeking to lead the church into denominationalism, who were preaching the doctrines of men, forsaking the truth, promoting hidden agendas to *change* the church, and ridiculing those who wanted to walk the old paths. There were not those, as there are too often today, who were trying to unseat good elderships and kick out gospel preachers in order to become more like the world and to please ignorant (of the Bible), compromising, sensual brethren.

While some preachers were more talented than others, almost any preacher in the county could go to any church of Christ in the county and be welcomed into the pulpit without reservation. It was well known he would not bring with him some perverted mistranslation of Scriptures. He would preach the truth, the Word of God (John 17:17), and direct men to obey it (2 The. 1:7-10), just like the local preacher would. There would be no uncertain sound put forth (1 Cor. 14:8). Those who heard him preach would not be left to wonder where he stood. If there did arise a question, he would answer it with a “Thus

saith the Lord,” and the honest querist would be satisfied with that. Not only that, but the preacher could go to any congregation in the area and preach the gospel of Christ without fear that he would be rebuked or ridiculed for having done so. Members of one congregation could visit with another congregation, knowing they would see, hear, and do the same things, prescribed by the authority of God, as at their home congregation (John 4:24). No, there did not exist sinless perfection among the saints, and there was plenty of room for instruction and growth, but there was also an overwhelming majority of church members who were united in their love for God, His Word, the Lord’s church, and one another (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3; Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:22).

This writer is not so naive as to think the remarks written above could be written of every church in every place in the past. Nor is it my conclusion that all problems with fellowship have arisen within my lifetime. All one has to do to know better than that is to read his New Testament. However, speaking from personal observation, firsthand knowledge, and from investigation into the recent history of fellowship in churches of Christ, this writer concludes there has been a change—a frightening and regrettable change in this generation—regarding the way the average church member views fellowship. Generally, there has been a marked turn from the loving joint participation enjoyed just a few years ago. As with individuals, there has likewise arisen among many congregations a jaded view toward other congregations. The reasons are many. The results are destructive to the church and to its work. The forfeiture of fellowship has brought about a general distrust, even resulting in alienation of brethren when such is not demanded. While the definition of “good brethren” may be different to some, it is the case far too often that “good brethren” have not today the fellowship they should have. Satan laughs, souls are lost, and the situation gets ever worse. Brethren, we need to be concerned. More than that, we need to be alarmed, and seek the solution according to God’s will.

THE CURRENT SITUATION

Again, this writer holds no claim to omniscience. I have not been everywhere, nor have I observed everything. However, I beseech the reader to give me the benefit of thinking I have a general idea of what

is going on in the brotherhood. If this is the case, allow me to set forth some observations of a general nature.

First, some will ask, “Why be so concerned?” The practice of fellowship, by its nature, is dependent upon the attitudes and the actions of those who would participate in it. Contrary to what some (who must believe in the false doctrine of “once saved, always saved,” for they carry on as if they are not going to have to give an answer some day—2 Cor. 5:10) think, say, and do, our attitudes, our actions, and our worship are important to our happiness now and eternally (cf., John 4:24). We dare not think we may, without God’s condemnation, ever entertain wrong attitudes or engage in wrong actions, for wrong is always wrong. If we have so thought, or so done, we must repent, seeking the forgiveness of God, against whom all sins are, and of man, if we have sinned against any man, and seek anew to bring ourselves into harmony with God’s will. Surely, all who seek His blessings will agree these are steps to be taken for the security of individuals, as well as for the health of the body, the church (Col. 1:18; Eph. 4:4). Wise men will affirm that the one true and living God has given a great blessing in the opportunity of fellowship for His children. As the sovereign God, He has exercised His authority in mandating its boundaries (Mat. 28:18; 1 John 1:6-10). Therefore, no man has the right to change the God-given borders in any way, not even to move them just one inch. None can, without displeasing God and endangering His eternal welfare, redraw the circle of fellowship. Since God has drawn the circle, no mere mortal can make the circle larger (to include those God does not) or to make it smaller (to exclude any God includes) than God made it. Nor should there be any desire so to do. However, sadly, in our day, there are extremes to which some have gone to limit fellowship beyond what God has limited it and to which others have gone to allow fellowship beyond what God has allowed.

The consequences are immediate and far-reaching. In the immediate sense, there is, at the least, the loss of the beneficial aspects of fellowship, which are so desperately needed. Beyond the immediate are the far-reaching consequences of mistrust, division, weakness, inability to accomplish what could be accomplished, and, ultimately, the loss of souls.

TWO EXTREMES TO AVOID

In our concern for having fellowship, there are two extremes to avoid. One is the extreme of loosing where God has not loosed allowing what God has not allowed, having fellowship with those with whom God has no fellowship (cf., Mat. 16:19). This extreme may wear the name “unity in diversity,” which, actually, is a misnomer for there is no such thing. These seek a manmade union while “agreeing to disagree.” The question asked so long ago still stands: “Can two walk together, except they be agreed?” (Amos 3:3). Certainly, not. Thus, Paul, by inspiration, instructed the Corinthians:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house of Chloe*, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Sadly, some, much like children on Christmas morning, have eagerly run, while visions of sugarplums danced in their heads, to have fellowship with preachers and practitioners of error. They see (almost) none as the enemy of God. As a result, they have thrust down and trampled the Word of God, turning their backs on Him to welcome into fellowship with them His very enemies (Jam. 4:4), becoming His enemies by so doing, and have forfeited fellowship with all who hold to the truth.

Another extreme to avoid is the extreme of binding where God has not bound (cf., Mat. 16:19). These see (almost) everyone as the enemy. Only a handful meet their standards, and the ones who do are standing on banana peels. Either extreme is wrong, brethren. It is wrong that some have made to be issues of fellowship that which should not divide us. Some have chosen sides against faithful brethren, opposing them as if they were the very embodiment of the very Devil himself, slandering and backbiting, falsely accusing as liberal, and opposing, all because of a difference in a matter of opinion or judgment, in some incidental or expediency, and not over a matter of faith. Too often, it appears, they act out of envy, jealousy, hatred, malice, and a blind rage, instead of love and righteousness.

I know full well I may be accused by some because of my having written the above. I understand some may run with these statements and make applications this writer has not made, and which will not stand at the judgment, but the truth is the truth, and it needs to be said. We have far too many today who are ready to make something a test of fellowship when God has not made it so. Then, after they have disturbed the peace of the church, alienated faithful brethren from one another, marked and avoided without scriptural basis, sown discord and fostered division, and after the church is hurt and brethren are in a turmoil, wondering which of the sides is “right,” the very ones who caused the uproar will accuse the “other side” of being the troublemakers of Israel! Sadly, Ahab’s descendants continue to this day in their misguided way.

And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Art thou he that troubleth Israel? And he answered, I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father’s house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of the LORD, and thou hast followed Baalim (1 Kin. 18:17-18).

Brethren, we must avoid every extreme, for one is as bad in its consequences as the other. Let us not be motivated by ungodliness, nor allow ourselves to be unwitting pawns, manipulated by ungodly men. Let us all return to the Bible, as our only safe and sure guide and renew our walk with God in the light of fellowship with Him and all faithful brethren.

THE FUTURE OF FELLOWSHIP IN THE LORD’S CHURCH

No human, unaided by inspiration, has the ability to look into the future and with a prophetic pronouncement declare with certainty what shall be. However, we may observe trends, and, from a study of the past, at least have an idea about what could happen if certain trends continue. That there is a current problem, and a potentially worse problem to come, and that something must be done, and done now, is a truth manifestly evident. That there are obstacles which must be overcome to accomplish what must be done is also abundantly clear. When it comes to fellowship, we ask, “Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?” (Acts 2:37).

Return To The Word Of God

We must all return to the source, to the authority, to learn the “who, what, when, where, and why,” as well as the *how* to have

fellowship God's way. While other chapters will deal with these points, let us be reminded here that the very basis of our fellowship with one another is our fellowship with God (1 John 1:3; Phi. 2:1-4). This is dependent upon our obedience to the Word of God (Luke 6:46; Heb. 5:8-9; Mat. 25:31-46). God the Father originated, God the Son executed, and God the Spirit revealed the plan whereby man can be reconciled to God and enjoy fellowship with the Godhead (Mat. 28:18-20). This is the plan we must follow.

How then shall we know who is in fellowship with God? All those, and only those, who are obedient hearers (Rom. 10:17; 2 The. 1:6-10; Jam. 1:22; Mat. 7:21-23), penitent believers (John 8:24; Luke 13:3; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38), and baptized professors of the deity of Christ (Mat. 16:16; Rom. 10:10; Acts 8:36-38; Gal. 3:26-27), are they who have fellowship with God. How do we know? The Bible tells us so!

They who have done the above, fulfilling the conditions required by God to obtain the blessings freely given by His grace, must continue faithfully (Rev. 2:10). As they do, they will continue separately from all who do not live faithfully.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. Having therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God (2 Cor. 6:14-7:1).

Do God's Will

We must all do what God, through His inspired revelation, says we must do to enter into fellowship with one another and to maintain this relationship. God's way is the right way. Ezra, leading the people from captivity to their homeland, wrote, "Then I proclaimed a fast there, at the river of Ahava, that we might afflict ourselves before our God, to seek of him a right way for us, and for our little ones, and for all our substance" (Ezra 8:21). So, to God we must go for the right way. Learning from Him the right way, we must do with all our might

His will. Thus, Christians must desire fellowship with one another. We must steadfastly stand and courageously fight to do right and to be right in this, and in all, areas. We must seek, with all our hearts, to be pure in our daily living, putting into practice what God has revealed in His truth. We dare not offer God less than our best (Mat. 6:33).

What does this mean, as far as practical application is concerned? The following are just a few of the many ways we might implement our desire to have Christian fellowship.

1. We ought to support our faithful brethren, and a great way to begin to do this is to attend the gospel meetings (and other activities) of faithful churches which meet within driving distance. Almost everywhere I go, brethren ask me how to encourage more from sister congregations to come to gospel meetings or lectureships. I always reply that the first step is to attend the activities in which **they** are engaged, and maybe that will encourage them to reciprocate. It appears we have gotten away from this practice, and we need to begin again to help one another in this area.

2. Another way to increase fellowship and the awareness of the need for more fellowship is to plan activities which use the preacher, or other members, from neighboring congregations. Some of the best meetings, vacation Bible schools, Bible bowls, youth rallies, lectureships, etc., in which this writer has been involved, were those where men from nearby congregations were used. Such goes a long way to strengthening the bonds of brethren.

3. Still another way to accomplish our goal is to remember and practice Matthew 7:12: "Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets." Perhaps most of us can remember times when we have been misquoted, misrepresented, or even falsely charged. What can happen to us can happen to others. No, we should not put our heads in the sand, remain ignorant of what is going on in the brotherhood, and, with a wave of the hand, dismiss the truth about false teaching and false teachers, or about ungodly brethren. Anyone who knows this writer knows I stand against error and will call the names of false teachers, marking them for their error. Yet, we must be people who will investigate before we condemn, making sure of the truth about the matter, and then act accordingly. This is the only right path to pursue. We often use the illustration about the one coal removed

from the fire soon growing cold; when then make the application to an individual church member who removes himself from the close association and partnership he should have with other members. As surely as an individual will grow cold by himself, so can the same happen to a congregation which does not work to achieve and to maintain the good, right, God-ordained fellowship with sister congregations.

Avoid Extremes

We must continue to grow, practicing and upholding what God's Word enjoins, and forsaking and opposing what He has prohibited, not turning to the left or to the right. In other words, we ought to "walk in the light." Let us seek to grow in patience, longsuffering, and compassion, while standing firmly on the solid foundation of God's truth, neither compromising, nor encouraging those in error. We know that some well known brethren have taken upon themselves to misuse the influence they gained when they preached the truth years ago; they have worked, sometimes under cover but lately more openly, to bring denominationalism into the church, or, as it seems to this writer, who came out of a manmade church and left his creed book written by men behind, to bring the church into denominationalism. As Israel of old, they have sought the evil alliances of men, turning their backs on the very God who saved them.

We know also that other brethren have, for whatever reasons, perhaps as a backlash against "liberalism," been too quick to condemn all who differ with them **in any way**, even about matters that should not divide us. As Elijah, they think they, and only they, are standing on God's side. They do not realize "seven thousand" have yet to bow the knee to Baal.

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and withal how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger unto Elijah, saying, So let the gods do *to me*, and more also, if I make not thy life as the life of one of them by to morrow about this time. And when he saw *that*, he arose, and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which *belongeth* to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a juniper tree: and he requested for himself that he might die; and said, It is enough; now, O LORD, take away my life; for I *am* not better than my fathers....And he came thither unto a cave, and lodged there; and, behold, the word of the LORD *came* to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah? And he said, I have been

very jealous for the LORD God of hosts: for the children of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thine altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, *even* I only, am left; and they seek my life, to take it away....And the LORD said unto him, Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael *to be* king over Syria: And Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint *to be* king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abelmeholah shalt thou anoint *to be* prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, *that* him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth from the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay. Yet I have left *me* seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed unto Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him (1 Kin. 19:1-4, 9-10, 15-18).

CONCLUSION

Where will the church be in another generation? Much depends upon what this generation thinks and does about fellowship. Probably, some of us need to realize we have not always done what we should have concerning this very problem. It may well be some need to realize we have made mistakes, at best, and have sinned, at worst. Too many in the church have allowed the evil influence of a wicked world to draw us away from the pure, fervent, sacrificial love we should have for brethren (Heb. 13:1; 1 Pet. 1:21ff). Emulating the ungodly, instead of the God of heaven and earth, some of us have, all too often, been too quick to condemn and too slow to conciliate. Others, mistaking compromising the truth for what they call tolerance and love, have encouraged those to whom God does not extend forgiveness or fellowship, and, flying in the face of God, have pronounced them “our brethren.”

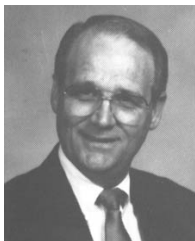
Where do we go from here? Let us all, as God’s people, work together to be together, leaving behind all things that hinder our joint participation. Let us all determine to be united and aggressively to seek unity, with all who are faithfully serving the Lord. Let us not reject another over a matter of opinion, nor accept one who differs over a matter of the faith. The old adage, “In faith, unity; in opinion, liberty; and, in all things, charity,” should not be forgotten.

What is the future of fellowship in the Lord’s church? The Divine side of fellowship has been determined and has not changed. The human side lies with us. On the practical side, it is what we will make it to be, and, if this world continues, the legacy of our efforts, or lack thereof, will be hailed or hated, depending upon our attitudes and our

actions. Thus, today, we must study carefully, think seriously, plan wisely, work zealously, live faithfully, seek diligently, and love fervently to secure the future of fellowship in the Lord's church and our own future beyond this life.

FELLOWSHIP AND MARK 9:38-41

Toney L. Smith



Toney L. Smith was born in Nashville, Arkansas, and raised in Texarkana, Texas. He preached for several years around the Texarkana area before entering Brown Trail School of Preaching, where he graduated in 1982. Toney has preached in Arkansas, Missouri, Oklahoma, Texas, and Tennessee. He is presently working with the Dresden Church of Christ in Dresden, Tennessee.

Toney and his wife Debby have three sons.

INTRODUCTION

The passage which we will be studying is one that is used by denominationalists and liberals alike to twist the Scriptures and thereby espouse a doctrine which is false. When a passage is misused and taken out of context, it will lead one into false conclusions. This passage requires some special attention due to the way it is being abused. The book of Mark is a beautiful record of Christ's life as a servant. Paul noted that Christ became a servant of mankind (Phi. 2:5-8). In Mark's gospel account, Christ is shown as one who humbled Himself to the needs and service of sinful men. Therefore, if we are to be disciples of Christ, we must also become servants and realize that servitude is the way to become great. Jesus said, "If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all" (Mark 9:35). A disciple is one that will endeavor to abound "in the work of the Lord" (1 Cor. 15:58) and "bring forth fruit unto [the glory of] God" (Rom. 7:4). An honest study of the verses before us will help us to become true disciples and profitable for the Lord's work. In fact, the great lesson in this passage is that we must serve in the name of Jesus and recognize the marks of a true disciple. There are a number of lessons to be gleaned from this passage. We will show the misconceptions and abuses of these verses and also learn some valuable ways in which we can become better servants in the kingdom of Christ.

THE IMMEDIATE CONTEXT

In the earlier verses (vv. 1-10) Peter, James, and John had been with the Lord on the mount of transfiguration and were confused as to what was meant by being raised from the dead. The apostles that had been left behind were not able to perform a miracle, though they had been given the ability to do so. They had tried to cast out a demon from a boy and could not (vv. 17-18). Jesus brought into question their lack of faith as the reason for their failure (v. 19). Perhaps they had taken for granted the miraculous gifts which had been bestowed upon them, or it may have been that they had become self-sufficient, and had left behind their dependance upon God. But whatever the reason, they had failed in the casting out of this demon, which must have been a blow to their self-assurance and called into question their position in the circle of disciples.

In verses 33-37 the disciples are quarreling and bickering over who is greatest in the kingdom. Their attention was not on service and fellowship as much as it was on preeminence. Jesus then gave a great and needed lesson in servitude and humility. He described the greatness of servitude in a way that is often misunderstood. He said, "If any man desire to be first, *the same* shall be last of all, and servant of all" (v. 35). Now observe the great object lesson that He gave. He took a little child and instructed them to be as the little one. In this illustration, Jesus clearly taught the necessity of dependance and the need for an attitude of service and reliance. It is evident that their faith was lacking and that their pride had blossomed and grown. Pride and self-reliance will always get in the way of our work for the Lord. No one can please God and accomplish His will without a faith that is centered on Christ rather than self.

Verses 42 through 50 continue the thought relative to service and fellowship. He shows them that God is never pleased when one is offended and hindered in his work for the Lord. It would be better for us to be removed from the scene than to cause a babe in Christ to go astray. Also, He shows that whatever would hinder our progress to heaven should be removed.

With these things in mind let us now turn our attention to the immediate context of verses 38-41.

A DISCIPLE NOT RECOGNIZED

In our assigned text, we see that John is concerned about a man that was casting out demons whom he did not know. Who was this man? Some have said that he was a disciple of John, who made use of the name of the Messiah, not as come but as near at hand, not knowing that Jesus was **the** Messiah.¹ However, this does not seem to be a valid assumption. It seems rather that this man believed in Him as the Christ, just as the other apostles did.

There are some who speculate that this event did not occur at this time, but rather at an earlier date. Those who make this claim do so partly because this event is sandwiched between the illustration of the child (vv. 33-37) and the prohibition relative to being a stumbling block (vv. 42-50). Some place this event as occurring on the way to the feast of tabernacles (John 7:2-10).² But I believe that this event is in its rightful place. John introduced this occurrence of the man casting out demons because there had been a rebuke for the selfish question asked concerning who would be the greatest in the kingdom. The statement from John comes as if to “cover up” the selfish nature of the disciples. Jesus was clear in His rebuttal, “Forbid him not.” It is evident that our Lord recognized him for what he was—a true disciple. It is not as some speculate that this man was not a true believer, but was only going through the motions. It is a fact that he was casting out demons and not just making false claims. It is true that in Acts 19 there were some that were trying to cast out demons who were not authorized of God (Acts 19:14-16). However, this is not the case with the man in our text. Not only was he casting out demons, he was doing it by the authority, the command, of Jesus. True, this man was not in the number of apostles, but the work that he did was with authority! First, he was accomplishing his aim, and Jesus affirmed that it was by divine authority. The man’s action was in opposition to the work of Satan. The devil does not cast out himself (Mat. 12:24-26); thus we can know that what the unknown man was doing came from God.

The disciples had tried to stop this man’s work and apparently John had taken a leading part in the opposition. We conclude that their attempt to curtail him had failed. He must have been truly committed to the fact that what he was doing was right and proper. John’s reason for forbidding him was that he “followeth not us” (v. 38); he

was not a close companion of their traveling party. Clearly there was some prejudice on the part of John that did not please our Lord. In fact, Jesus stated that they should not forbid him. If this man had been an enemy of Christ it would have been proper to oppose his work, but Jesus affirmed that the miracles were being done “in my name” (v. 39).

MISCONCEPTIONS AND FALSE TEACHINGS

Denominational preachers and teachers have for years used this passage to try and prove that there is more than one group of approved disciples. They say that Christ recognizes more than one way to salvation. Matthew Henry says:

giving honor to Him as the fountain of grace, preaching down sin, and preaching up Christ, are good things, very good things, which ought not to be forbidden to any, merely because they follow not with us. Because those that differed in communion, while they agreed to fight against Satan under the banner of Christ, ought to look upon one another as on the same side, notwithstanding that difference.³

Denominationalism is in fact based upon the false doctrine that we can all believe and practice different religious notions and still be headed in the same direction. One of their popular statements is, “We are all headed to heaven on different roads,” which is in complete opposition to Matthew 7:13-14. It truly is sad to know that the world believes this lie, but it is heartbreaking to see even those who claim to be members of the body of Christ espouse the same damning rhetoric. Listen to what some of our own are saying.

Rubel Shelly, in his Centerville speech, used Mark 9:38-42 in order to make two points: (1) We are Christians only, but “not the only Christians”; in other words, there may be others “out there” of whom we know little or nothing. (2) Our attitude should not be that of John; we should not be in the “forbidding” business, but rather, should accept those who are working “in the name of the Lord.”⁴

Rick Atchley on October 14, 1990 at the Richland Hills Church of Christ in Ft. Worth, Texas, delivered a sermon entitled “Don’t Bother Your Brother.” In his lesson based on Mark 9:38-41, Mr. Atchley stated a number of things that are as far from the truth as heaven is from hell. Notice:

Let’s not limit the kingdom of God to the size of one brotherhood...my history and heritage is churches of Christ. I was raised in churches of Christ...maybe this wasn’t said, but this is what I

heard...the only people that could go to heaven were in churches of Christ...I'm going to suggest to you not only is that NOT Biblical, but it is in fact a violation of the very restoration plea to which we are heirs.⁵

Do either of the above absurd positions sound like the things which Jesus taught concerning the one body, one doctrine, one way to heaven concept? **No!** In fact, these are completely contrary to clear and concise Bible truths.

Brother Franklin Camp gives a lengthy study of this passage in the publication *The Word Of Life*. He stated,

Now, if this is an argument to justify there being people in the denominations that are Christians, then it also justifies those same people's staying right where they are. If not, why not? This deserves an answer. I do not believe that one can read this event and have knowledge of the Scriptures and ever make it harmonize with the fact that it would justify one's staying in some denomination. But, if this is an example of one's being in a denomination, then it is also an example of one's staying there. That which proves too much proves nothing.⁶

Also note from the same publication, "There is no indication that the one that John forbade and the one that Jesus defended was associated with something that was contrary to the will of God. Can this be said of those in denominations?"⁷

In a *Gospel Advocate* article brother Hugo McCord wrote,

Just because the exorcist of Mark 9 was not personally known by John does not mean he was a false teacher. On the contrary, Jesus approved of the man, and we know that Jesus would not approve of a false teacher (cf.: Matt. 7:15-27). The man actually cast out devils in Jesus' name, a thing no imposter could do (Cf.: Acts 19:13-16).⁸

J. Noel Meredith stated concerning Mark 9:38-42:

The man was doing it in the name of the Lord; he was doing a mighty work. The man was on the Lord's side, even though he was not traveling with the apostles. This does not teach that one can be in a denomination and still be pleasing to the Lord.⁹

Even though there are some that would profess that there are "devout knowledgeable Christians" in denominations, it cannot be so. It cannot be so because the Bible teaches that there is only one body (Eph. 4:4), which is the church (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18, 24). Christ died to purchase the church (Acts 20:28). One can be saved only in the church of the New Testament, which is the church of Christ (Acts 2:37-47; Eph. 5:23).

LESSONS THAT WE LEARN

First, a disciple of Christ is one who is in fellowship with God. We are not insinuating that there can be unity in diversity. The Bible will not support such an idea. But from our text we see that John did not consider himself in fellowship with the man casting out the demon. But it is abundantly clear that Jesus declared that He was in fellowship with him. Among the greatest joys of Christianity is the Christian fellowship which is shared in the Lord. The Bible has much to say about fellowship and we often speak of the need for more fellowship and the beauty of it, "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). "Can two walk together, except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3).

The word *fellowship* is found 17 times in the Bible. There are three Greek words which are used to convey the meaning, though not always translated fellowship. These words are, *koinonia* (communion, 1 Cor. 10:16), *koinonos* (comrade, associate; 1 Cor. 10:20-21, 2 Cor. 8:23), and *metocha* (a sharing, fellowship, 2 Cor. 6:14).¹⁰ Fellowship is not determined nor established by the minds of men; it is established by God and His Word, as well as the way an individual reacts to that Word of truth. Some have been so bold and arrogant as to say that one is to be in fellowship so long as he does what he feels is right. The Bible gives a great example of what establishes fellowship. In Acts 2 we find Peter delivering that gospel sermon on Pentecost. The Scriptures say that "they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men *and* brethren, what shall we do?" (Acts 2:37). Now notice what established the fellowship. They were told to "Repent, and be baptized" (v. 38); "they that gladly received his word were baptized" (v. 41); "and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (vv. 41-42). The fellowship was established when they heard the gospel and obeyed it! Some did not obey (v. 41); thus they were not added to the fellowship. That fellowship was in the church which Christ established (Mat. 16:18; Luke 24:47); it was and is not found anywhere else. Here is a Bible example of how biblical fellowship is established and where it is to be found.

We can maintain that fellowship only when both individuals “walk in the light” (1 John 1:7); thus both are in fellowship with God. That which puts one in fellowship with God puts one in fellowship one with another. One cannot be in fellowship with those who are walking in darkness (Eph. 5:11). Therefore, the notion of having fellowship with denominationalism is false. And our text clearly shows that there is to be fellowship only with those who are walking in the light—those who are approved by our Lord.

Second, we can recognize a disciple of Christ by observing what he is doing and how it is being done. The man in Mark 9 was doing the Lord’s will. He was approved by Jesus, and he was doing his work by the Lord’s authority. We can know for sure that it was the Lord’s will because the Lord rebuked John for questioning one that was working in His name.

Let us observe the man John mentioned and note carefully what is actually recorded about him. In so doing we can recognize whether or not he was a disciple. We observe that he was **actually casting out demons**, he was doing so **in the name of Christ**, Jesus said **forbid him not**, and that he is **not against** us. The Lord would never approve a false teacher. The authority given him and the things that he did were proof that he was a disciple.

It is common today for men to preach salvation in the name of the Lord without including all that is necessary. When men change God’s plan and do not practice New Testament Christianity, we know that they are not disciples of Christ. In fact, we have some words from Paul that affirms this point. In Galatians 1:6-7 Paul said, “I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel: Which is not another; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.” Also, “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Do these sound as if it does not matter what is taught? We can know for sure who is a disciple of Christ by listening to the doctrine that is taught and looking at the life that is lived. A disciple follows the Lord in doctrine and life (1 Cor. 12:1-2; 15:58). Men who obey a denominational doctrine cannot be disciples of Christ! In fact, a disciple of Christ is required to rebuke those who oppose the doctrine of Christ (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Eph. 5:11).

Third, a prideful attitude can lead to jealousy. In our text the need to be greatest overshadowed the work that was to be accomplished in the Lord's name. Jealousy is a dangerous thing. In Galatians 5:14-15, Paul contrasts love with jealousy and pride. In the list of the works of the flesh in verse 19, Paul lists *emulations* which means "jealousy." In the evil sense it can be defined as rivalry, anger against the object of one's jealous spirit, and a general spirit of distrust and suspicion. The jealous man is one who is resentfully suspicious of a rival's influence. He is selfish and fearful that he will lose something to his rival. The apostles demonstrated these attitudes against the man who was casting out the demons.

We would do well to learn from this incident in our day. The followers of Jesus today must not be jealous of each other's work, opportunities, or abilities. The one talent man can become envious of the five talent man (Mat. 25:24); instead we are to be workers together (1 Cor. 3:9). Just imagine how much work would be accomplished if all would encourage and not expend our energies in "forbidding." Jesus intends for the church to work as servants and never hinder one another as Mark 9:41 shows: "For whosoever shall give you a cup of water to drink in my name, because ye belong to Christ, verily I say unto you, he shall not lose his reward." Paul emphasizes that part of our service to one another is helping one another serve the Lord.

From whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love (Eph. 4:16).

The church today really needs to learn this lesson. There is great value in accepting and appreciating all of the faithful members of the Lord's church. It is much like Abraham said to Lot: "We *be* brethren" (Gen. 13:8). We are to be serving the Lord and one another as we journey toward eternity. We all need each other. We should strive for greater attitudes of humility and a greater desire for service. This is a real mark of our discipleship.¹¹

We are not "casting out demons" in the same manner that the man did in our text, but surely we can realize that we are casting out spiritual demons by helping people come to obey the gospel. We should work together in this great task. Some are only hindering the

spreading of the truth and the saving of lost souls—not only Rubel Shelly and Rick Atchley (already mentioned), but many others. One that quickly comes to mind is Max Lucado. His influence is spread far and wide. And he has hindered my work and that of many others.

Just recently, I was asked to review a sermon tape from a Baptist preacher in Memphis, Tennessee. The lesson was on baptism. Of course the Baptist preacher taught that one's salvation does not depend upon baptism. I had prepared some notes to send to the person who wanted me to review the tape. The notes were to help her study with a friend who also did not agree that baptism was essential. To my sad surprise the next day I received another tape, which was also on baptism and I was asked to review this one because it was by a "Church of Christ" preacher. Friends, this one was by Max Lucado, who also did not believe that baptism was necessary to one's salvation! Do you think that he hindered the teaching of the truth to this person's friend? Absolutely he did! Mr. Lucado makes a joke of the church as he preaches in denominational churches. He ought to repent or stop claiming to be a disciple of Christ, a member of the church of Christ. His nonsense has hindered the Lord's church and has made the work more difficult. Jesus emphasized that we should help one another, not hinder.

The next lesson we learn from Mark 9 is that people cannot be neutral relative to Christ. Mark 9:40 says: "For he that is not against us is on our part." It is absolutely impossible for one to occupy neutral ground with reference to Christ. Compare this verse with Matthew 12:30: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." When we compare these two verses, they seem almost contradictory, but they are not when the context of each statement is studied. In Matthew 12:30 Jesus had been charged by enemies of being in league with the Devil. He declared that the person who attempted to be neutral and refused to take a stand with Him when He was attacked was really against Him.

The context of Mark 9:40 is different. It is not a question of attacks on Jesus, but of serving Him and being a true disciple. This man was serving the Lord with His approval and by His authority, and his work was condoned by the Lord. This man had not made an attack on Jesus or the doctrine that was being taught. "But Jesus said, Forbid him not: for there is no man which shall do a miracle in my name, that

can **lightly speak evil of me**" (Mark 9:39). In other words, one that was actually doing miracles by the authority of Christ had enough faith and was showing that he would not lightly, easily, or quickly betray Christ. The man which John saw was in harmony with Christ. He was not neutral relative to Christ or in the demonstration of his work for the Lord.

Both Mark 9:40 and Matthew 12:30 declare to all of us today that it is utterly impossible to stand in the middle or straddle the fence when it comes to our allegiance. We are either for New Testament Christianity or we are not. We are for the church of Christ or we are not. We are for men's salvation or we are not! I can only pray that today men who will not "stand in the line of fire" will just get out of the way so we can be about the business of warring against Satan. It is a sad and terrible situation when so called gospel preachers will not take a stand. It simply makes the work harder for those who will "earnestly contend for the faith" (Jude 3).

Paul had much to say about the need to stand when others would not. He told Timothy in 2 Timothy 1:13, "Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus." He warned how that some would hinder the work. "The one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds" (Phi. 1:16). Men like Alexander the copper-smith caused problems for Paul (2 Tim. 4:14) as did others. Demas forsook Paul, "having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10).

There is a great need today for men who will stand foursquare upon the gospel of Christ—men who will stand at all cost. There is no neutral ground. The church today must be careful never to be "ashamed of the gospel of Christ" (Rom. 1:16). We are either for the Lord or for Satan.

CONCLUSION

Though many misuse and abuse the passage which we have studied, it stands as a clear lesson for all of us today. It does not teach unity in diversity as some claim. It does not indicate that there are saved people in the various religious groups. Truth does not stand on opposite sides of the religious fence. I cannot understand why the world does not accept the truth that makes men free (John 8:32); it is hard to comprehend. Maybe harder to understand is the reason that many of our brethren are taking up the flag of denominationalism and

holding it high. It is a scary and sad thing to see. Paul aptly describes the time in which we live.

For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; And they shall turn away *their* ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4).

Fables abound and itching ears are growing in number.

Our text shows that we are to be busy in the kingdom of Christ and that no one should feel more important than someone else. All have a work to do and when we get busy with the work of serving one another, God's will can be done. May God be our strength and guide, and may it ever be said of us as we "fight the good fight of faith" (1 Tim. 6:12) in the kingdom of Christ. "He shall not lose his reward" (Mark 9:41).

ENDNOTES

¹Matthew Henry, *Commentary On Mark* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1983), p. 416.

²H. Leo Boles, *Commentary On Luke* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co., 1958), p. 206.

³Henry, pp. 416-417.

⁴Rubel Shelly Speech, "Is Unity Possible?" Centerville, TN: March 21, 1983.

⁵Goebel Music, *Behold the Pattern* (Colleyville, TX: Goebel Music Publications, 1992), p. 143.

⁶Franklin Camp, *The Word Of Life* (August 1983), pp. 2-4.

⁷Ibid.

⁸Hugo McCord, "Unity," *Gospel Advocate*, 5 September 1983, p. 560.

⁹J. Noel Meredith, "Editorial," *Christian Light*, Oct/Nov, 1983, pp. 3, 9.

¹⁰Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.), pp. 352, 407.

¹¹Mike McDaniel, notes taken from a sermon outline delivered by brother McDaniel. (Greenfield, TN: June 15, 1997).

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FELLOWSHIP AND EPHESIANS 4:1-6

Clifford Newell, Jr.



Clifford Newell, Jr. was born and reared in Mt. Pleasant, Michigan. He attended the Memphis School of Preaching, Alabama Christian School of Religion (B.A. and M.A.), Kentucky State University (M.P.A.), and is a D.Min candidate at Southern Christian University. Since 1986 he has taught religious courses at colleges, universities, and schools of preaching.

His preaching has involved radio and television programs, lectureships, and mission trips to Scotland. He is married to the former Diane Elaine King, and they have two children: Joy Wooten and Clifford III. He has been preaching for 23 years and is currently working with the East Bristol Church of Christ in

Bristol, Virginia.

One of the more beautiful words, selected by the Holy Spirit, and recorded by men under the guidance of inspiration, is fellowship. It is not only filled with beauty, it is also a comprehensive term. Fellowship is an important, interesting, and challenging word. There can be no greater desire dwelling in the heart of man than a deep desire for true fellowship. Unity and fellowship are words very closely related, for both words convey the idea of “togetherness.” However, there is a widespread conspiracy that has taken shape in recent years that blurs the distinction between the Lord’s Church and the counterfeits—the denominations. Four specific biblical doctrines have come under attack in the attempt to create credibility for denominationalism: fellowship, unity, grace, and baptism. There are some within the church who contending that unanimity of doctrinal belief and practice must not be the basis upon which fellowship is achieved. Thus, we ought to fellowship each other based upon our commonalities—the fundamentals shared by all who profess faith in Christ. We must realize that the real problem of division is basically, primarily, and almost altogether a doctrinal one. Until we are united doctrinally, these divisions will continue and fellowship will be interrupted.

DEFINITION OF TERMS

It will be necessary for us to clearly and concisely define our terms. According to J. B. Smith there are three words that are translated fellowship in the New Testament.

Koinonia is recorded in the Holy Scriptures a total of twenty times. With reference to koinonia we mean: fellowship, contribution, communion, distribution, communication, and communicate as found in the KJV. Koinonos is found a total of ten times; with emphasis upon: partaker, partner, fellowship, and companion. Metoche is used but once in the pages of Holy Writ and is translated fellowship.¹

McClintock and Strong contend that “fellowship (κοινωνία) is joint interest, or the having one common stock. The fellowship of the saints is twofold: (1) With God (1 John 1:3; 1 Cor. 1:9; 1 Cor. 13:14); (2) With one another (1 John 1:7).”²

What shall we conclude from these words and their definitions? Fellowship is a joint participation among people based upon the acceptance and continual obedience of the truth.

FELLOWSHIP, DOCTRINE, GOSPEL

Is there any correlation among these three terms: *fellowship, doctrine, gospel*? How does fellowship relate to the “core gospel”? According to Bill Love, Peter preached Christ crucified, buried, and raised by the plan and power of God for the salvation of mankind (the “core gospel”). That was the nucleus of the gospel that changed the world.³ Love’s definition and concept must be challenged because he (and others) advocate that fellowship may be enacted on the basis of a brief list of beliefs which all sects “within” so-called Christendom have held in common. Agreement on what is to be included in the core gospel is certainly lacking—to say the least. However, most are in agreement that belief in Jesus—especially His death, burial, and resurrection—is the central thesis by which we must agree in order to have fellowship.⁴

To what extent should doctrine determine fellowship? Despite the popularity of the “core doctrine” position, the Bible clearly teaches that doctrinal correctness and fellowship are inseparably linked together. Fellowship begins with God as can be seen from the apostolic pen of John, “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” (1 John

1:3). Therefore, fellowship must first be with God, and then fellowship will naturally result with other people who are in fellowship with God. John further writes, “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” (1 John 1:7). The matter of fellowship has to be based upon the absolute standard, the Word of God. The Sacred Scriptures are the sole authority. To be clearly understood, and straight to the point, we cannot allow personal friendships or kinships to cause one to continue in fellowship with an individual or a congregation who persists in false doctrine and in unauthorized practices in worship which would lead the church into apostasy.

It is important when studying the term fellowship that one should recognize that the new hermeneutic/change agent maintains that only the seven ones of Ephesians 4 qualify as doctrinal tests of fellowship.⁵ Upon this basis, all other doctrinal questions are relegated to a nonessential status. If a particular viewpoint or doctrinal issue falls outside the scope of the “seven ones,” then that viewpoint must be held as opinion and not allowed to hamper or hinder fellowship with those who hold a differing opinion on that issue. Some specific doctrines which the new hermeneutics would include in their fellowship are: mechanical instruments of music, solos/choirs, millennialism, women’s role, and others.

EPHESIANS 4:1-6

“I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called” (Eph. 4:1).

Inspiration opens chapter four with an earnest plea from the apostle Paul for fellowship. Paul mentions that he is a prisoner. This no doubt can be expressed in two ways: (1) Paul was a literal prisoner in Rome under what we might call house arrest and you can be sure he was not there because he was a murderer, thief, evildoer, busybody, but as a Christian (1 Pet. 4:15-16). This would be around A.D. 60, and (2) Paul was a prisoner “of the Lord” because he was in the Lord and for His sake. It was as a Christian and the cause of Christ that he suffered bonds. Paul speaks as a prisoner not to excite sympathy, nor merely to add weight to his exhortation, but rather as exulting that he was counted worthy to suffer for Christ’s sake.

When Paul addressed them, he did so with kindness and compassion. *Beseech* carries with it the idea of being called or entreated. This calling, pleading, or entreating to a higher life, is worthy of being imitated. "Walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" is to walk worthily and is a designation of the Christian's total behavior pattern. It is the exhibition of the kind of life that seeks to honor Jesus Christ. The Ephesians, like all in the Christian dispensation, had been called by the gospel:

Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle (2 The. 2:14-15).

They were to walk, but this walk carries with it the idea of aggressive action. A Christian has duties and responsibilities which he must perform in order to please God (John 15:1-6). This walk is to be a worthy walk, which does not include just any doctrine, but the gospel. The steadfastness to the doctrine of Christ (1 Cor. 15:58; 2 Tim. 4:7-8; 2 John 9-11) makes this a worthy vocation. This vocation or the Christian life, should be our full time vocation, not the secular work of which one may be employed. It is our full time vocation or calling to live the Christian life at all times and in all places.

"With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love" (Eph. 4:2).

The success or failure of the Christian walk to a large measure will be dependant upon the temperament of those professing to be Christians. The Christian's walk is to be with the temperament of lowliness, meekness, longsuffering, and forbearance. *Lowliness*, or humility, is the idea that humility is a becoming virtue in Christians because it reflects their evaluation of themselves in respect to Jehovah God. Lowliness is humility of mind and deportment, possessing a deep sense of moral smallness. *Meekness* is the yielding of one's strength to the use of another, gentleness, or kindness. It is closely connected with the spirit of submissiveness. It refers to moral authority and power issuing restraint as far as human temptations are concerned. *Longsuffering* is being patient, steadfast, possessing stamina, and courage in the presence of adversity. Our Lord expressed the attitude of longsuffering—"The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not will-

ing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance” (2 Pet. 3:9). “Forbearing one another in love” is being tolerant where such is permissible and having the ability to overlook the little things that are insignificant. It carries with it the idea to hold up or endure because of the principle of love.

“Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3).

Endeavoring means “to be diligent, to make haste, to be zealous.” Each of these characteristics carry the idea of working hard because there is a sense of urgency. Illustration: If your house was on fire, I would raise my voice and show some excitement. In like manner, is there a sense of urgency in the gospel of Christ? Is there any urgency in contending for the biblical based fellowship? “To keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace” means to be diligent in watching over or preserving of the oneness of the Spirit. Oneness is the unity that comes from the Spirit and firmly binds together in harmony. Thus, we have the Christian who walks worthily by keeping or watching over the unity that comes from the Spirit. This unity is of the Spirit; i.e., He gives us the total direction as to how we should live, worship, teach, etc. (2 Tim. 3:16-17). This unity must be kept or maintained with a watchful care. This is the responsibility of all Christians, not just “leading men” in the brotherhood. This unity must be kept with diligence (cf., Jude 3; 2 Tim. 4:1-4; Phi. 1:16-17). It is of special note that the emphasis is upon the unity of the Spirit and not the spirit of unity!

The unity of the Spirit means the unity that is furnished and wrought by the teaching of the Holy Spirit through inspired men. The unity that comes from the Spirit is the blending together of particles which are identical and of the very same kind. Illustration: If I were to break the tibia so that it is severed unto two pieces, I would expect the bone to grow back together. That would be unity; i.e., elements of the same kind blending together in a cohesive manner and thus forming one out of the same material and identical in nature. Surely, people would recognize such as unity or oneness. Where oneness of faith and purpose exist, God’s people will be a unit, i.e., they will be cemented together as one.⁶

“There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling” (Eph. 4:4).

When Paul wrote to the Ephesians, he recorded by inspiration the Spirit’s plan for fellowship (Eph. 4:1-6). These seven pillars are the

undergirding superstructure of the “oneness” of Christianity. We are not saying that fellowship is based only on these items listed below, for Paul elsewhere spoke of united mind, love, and judgment, among other things.

“One body” (unity of organization)—This has reference to the church, “And hath put all *things* under his feet, and gave him *to be* the head over all *things* to the church, Which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all” (Eph. 1:22-23).

For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition *between us*; Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, *even* the law of commandments *contained* in ordinances; for to make in himself of twain one new man, *so* making peace; And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:14-16).

“Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body” (Eph. 5:23). In this body, God has reconciled both Jew and Gentile (Eph. 2:14). The church (body) consists all of the saved (Acts 2:47). This body is not fragmented into modern day denominations. It is holy (the divine side) and contains all the saved. Note: if God adds to the church such as are being saved, then only the saved are members of His body. If not, why not? The one body is the unit of organization, as Paul declared, “But now *are they* many members, yet but one body” (1 Cor. 12:20). The inspired one continued, “For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: So we, *being* many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another” (Rom. 12:4-5). “But if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth” (1 Tim. 3:15).

“One Spirit”(unity of guidance)—This is the Holy Spirit of God, the third person in the Godhood. He dwells in the church as noted by Paul:

Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and *that* the Spirit of God dwelleth in you? If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which *temple* ye are (1 Cor. 3:16-17).

He dwells in the Christian:

What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost *which is* in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's (1 Cor. 6:19-20).

"For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father" (Eph. 2:18). "That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man" (Eph. 3:16). "In whom ye also *trusted*, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation: in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise" (Eph. 1:13). "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Eph. 4:30). "And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (Eph. 6:17). "For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

"One Hope" (unity of aspiration)—There is one hope of your calling. That one hope is built upon faith: "Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Heb. 11:1). "That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world" (Eph. 2:12). "In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began" (Tit. 1:2). "That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Tit. 3:7). Mention is made of the hope of the gospel:

If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and *be* not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, *and* which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister (Col. 1:23).

The gospel furnishes faith upon which hope rests. This is the one and only hope we have of eternal life!

"One Lord, one faith, one baptism" (Eph. 4:5).

An observation worthy of note is the placement of "one Lord" in the very middle of the seven ones. In the very middle of the fellowship issue is Christ! Everything revolves around Him. It is through that one Lord that God speaks to us (Heb. 1:2). To Him God has given all authority (Mat. 28:18). In Ephesians 2:14-17 we learn that Christ is

our peace, He made peace, and He preached peace. It is in and through Christ that we can be at peace both with God and with our fellow man. Before there can be biblical fellowship, there must be at least three in agreement—you, your brother, and the Lord. One's obedience to the gospel (Acts 15:7; Heb. 11:6; Acts 17:30; Rom. 10:10; Rom. 6:1-4) establishes fellowship with God. Then others who have obeyed the gospel plan of salvation **and** who are walking in the truth (1 John 1:7) are in fellowship with each other. Illustration: Ananias and Sapphira agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord. They were in fellowship with each other but not in fellowship with the Lord for they were not in agreement with the Lord God (Acts 5:9).

Christ is the common denominator upon which all factions and frictions can be reduced. In Christ all are one (Gal. 3:28). He is the center plank in God's wonderful plan for fellowship.

"One Lord" (unity of authority)—"Blessed *be* the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly *places* in Christ" (Eph. 1:3). "Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints" (Eph. 1:15). "In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord" (Eph. 2:21). "According to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord" (Eph. 3:11). "I therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called" (Eph. 4:1). "For ye were sometimes darkness, but now *are ye* light in the Lord: walk as children of light" (Eph. 5:8). "Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord *is*" (Eph. 5:17). "Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ" (Eph. 5:20). "Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord" (Eph. 5:22). "Children, obey your parents in the Lord: for this is right...And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord" (Eph. 6:1, 4). "Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might" (Eph. 6:10). "Grace *be* with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen" (Eph. 6:24). Hence, there must be complete submission to Him and His authority (Mat. 7:21; Luke 6:46).

"One Faith" (unity of message)—This has reference to the one system of faith, the gospel. However, some (the change agents) would

contend that the basis for fellowship/unity is to be found in these seven ones of Ephesians, **according to their definition**. As an example, notice that Rubel Shelly states, “The one faith has nothing to do with our methods and procedures of doing God’s work; it has to do with the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus and our response to that once-for-all act of atonement.”⁷ Why is it necessary to insist that the “one faith” has nothing to do with “methods and procedures of doing God’s work?” Because if the “one faith” excludes God’s “methods and procedures” for worshipping Him in spirit and in truth, then mechanical instruments of music would be authorized in that “one faith.” Therefore, this position (held by change agents) violates the fundamental demands of the gospel. G. C. Brewer stated:

The faith means the gospel or the Christian religion. In Gal. 1:6-9 the apostle declares that he had preached the gospel and pronounces an anathema on any man or angel who preaches another gospel or a different gospel from that which he had preached. Yet in the same chapter, verse 23, he says he preached the faith. Therefore the gospel and the faith are one and the same thing. He also says that he had formerly made havoc of the faith. He did this by persecuting Christians and by trying to exterminate Christianity. This makes it plain that the gospel, Christianity, and the faith are all just different expressions that have the same meaning.⁸

A great company of priests were obedient unto “the faith” (Acts 6:7). Man must obey the gospel (2 The. 1:7-9), but these are not distinct systems of obedience; to obey the faith is to obey the gospel. We are to contend for “the faith” (Jude 3), yet we are set for the defense of “the gospel” (Phi. 1:16-17). If a man does not provide for his own household, he has denied “the faith” (1 Tim. 5:8). Based on the change agents definition; where in the seven ones does this responsibility, of providing for one’s family, come into the picture? In 1 Timothy we learn that some would depart from “the faith” by forbidding to marry and commanding to abstain from meats (1 Tim. 4:1-3). Would this be a denial of the atonement? Surely, surely, one can see that this definition and application is unscriptural and unwarranted!⁹

“One baptism” (unity of practice)—The Hebrews writer states “the doctrine of baptisms” (Heb. 6:2): there was the baptism of John which was unto repentance (Mat. 3:11), there was the baptism of Moses, (1 Cor. 10:2), there was the baptism of suffering (Mat. 20:22), there

was the baptism of the Holy Spirit (Acts 1:5, 8; 2:1-4; this Holy Spirit baptism was not for everyone, but was promised only to the apostles), there will be the baptism of fire (1 Cor. 3:13-15; Mat. 3:11; the baptism of fire is future and embraces the end of time when men's works will be tried by fire), there is also the baptism of the Great Commission (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Luke 24:46-47; this is the baptism that Paul obeyed in Acts 22:16, and which Christ bound upon all men in order to be saved). Baptism is by immersion: "Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life" (Rom. 6:4). The purpose is expressly stated in these words, "Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost" (Acts 2:38). An interesting observation: when one considers the passages regarding the Great Commission baptism, the administrator is not told what to say, he is only told what to do!

"One God and Father of all, who *is* above all, and through all, and in you all" (Eph. 4:6).

"One God" (unity of worship)—The seventh of these great unities is God Himself. Luke recorded:

For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device (Acts 17:28-29).

Thus, Paul presents the unity of God. This reminds us of the first commandment in the Decalogue: "Thou shalt have no other gods before me" (Exo. 20:3). Israel was constantly reminded: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God *is* one LORD" (Deu. 6:4). Today, we need to be continually reminded of the truth: there is **one God**. "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified" (Acts 20:32). "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" (Mat. 4:10).

But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us...For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God...For we are his workmanship, created in

Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them...And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby (Eph. 2:4, 8, 10, 16).

“To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God” (Eph. 3:10). “And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ’s sake hath forgiven you” (Eph. 4:32).

CONCLUSION

The Word of God becomes the only basis to fellowship, not the unauthorized creeds and innovations of men. What divides the religious world is not what the Bible teaches—but what it does not teach! It does not teach that one can fellowship solely upon the basis of commonalities. However, it does teach that although fellowship is desirable, it must be obtained legitimately.

ENDNOTES

¹J. B. Smith, *Greek-English Concordance To The New Testament* (Scottsdale, PA: Herald Press, 1955), pp. 205, 229.

²John McClintock and James Strong, *Cyclopedia of Biblical, Theological, and Ecclesiastical Literature* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1969), 3:527.

³Bill Love, *The Core Gospel* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992), p. 32.

⁴I am indebted to Dave Miller, *Piloting The Strait* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996) and to Curtis A. Cates, *The Second Incarnation*, (Memphis, TN: Cates Publications, 1990) for their works regarding this material.

⁵The seven “ones” of Ephesians 4 are doctrinal tests for fellowship when properly understood. For example, the “one faith” or system of faith is the New Testament in its entirety. What doctrinal question or issue of fellowship can be raised that is not covered in these seven ones?

⁶Clifford Newell, Jr., *The Bible Doctrine Of Unity* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1997), p. 45-46.

⁷Rubel Shelly, *I Just Want to be a Christian* (Nashville, TN: 20th Century Christian, 1984), p. 82.

⁸G. C. Brewer, *Contending For The Faith* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Co, 1971), p. 18.

⁹Don DeWalt, *The Church in the Bible* (Joplin, MO: College Press, 1958), p. 307. “This refers to the whole scheme of redemption as it is revealed in the Bible but more especially to the revelation of the New Testament.”

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FELLOWSHIP AND EPHESIANS 5:11

Eddie Whitten



Eddie Whitten worked in industry for thirty years before going into full-time preaching. He attended Brown Trail School of Preaching (1967-1969). He preached in San Antonio before returning to Brown Trail where he worked as the Administrator and Director of the School of Preaching from 1971-1989. He served as an elder of the Brown Trail church for fifteen years.

Eddie now preaches for the Northeast Church of Christ in Hurst, Texas. He is Co-owner and President of the *Firm Foundation* and works as Business Manager of the magazine. He and his late wife are the parents of three daughters, nine grandchildren, and six great-grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION

This is a “made-up” story. A man once said to a Christian, “Let’s go have a beer.” The Christian responded, “No, I do not believe in drinking beer.” Some may have a problem with the Christian’s attitude in making that statement, but most would not. They would say, “Well, even though I may not agree with him, he has a right to his own opinion.” There would be no wholesale outcry against drinking beer because it is not against the law to do so unless further consequences occur. Another man may say to a Christian: “Let’s go rob a bank!” The Christian would respond: “No, I do not believe in stealing. That is breaking the law, and I do not believe it is right to break the law.” Hardly anyone would disagree with the Christian’s response. They would recognize that it is unlawful to rob banks. There would be hearty support for the Christian and perhaps legal steps taken against the man who suggested such an outrageous venture. Another man may say to a Christian: “I believe one can be saved regardless of what he believes because we are all trying to go to the same heaven, just by different directions.” The Christian responds: “I do not believe that because the Bible does not teach that doctrine.” The Christian is

castigated by most people as being legalistic, bigoted, narrow, and unloving.

What makes the difference in the reactions to the responses of the Christian under these different circumstances? Even though the above are “made-up” illustrations, they strike home to all who have faced similar situations, and they are as real and as close as members of their own families.

In our discussion, it will be our intention to (1) define “fellowship,” (2) define “unfruitful works of darkness,” (3) give Biblical obligations concerning Ephesians 5:11, and (4) make some summary observations.

FELLOWSHIP

Our text: “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.” This short verse is **negative** in that it is restrictive! The liberals do not find that acceptable. “Positive” preaching is their cry! Do not be negative with regard to religion because that is contrary to the loving nature of God. How would anyone **dare** assign a negative attitude to our Lord Jesus Christ who loved all men enough to die for them? They need to read more of their Bible, such as Matthew 23. Jesus did not hate anyone in the manner that we consider “hate” today. However, He taught that if one did not “hate” his father and mother, brother and sister, even himself, he could not be His disciple. “If any *man* come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple” (Luke 14:26). This simply means that one is not to love anyone or anything more than he loves our Lord Jesus Christ.

Our love for Jesus compels us to follow His teachings over the teachings of men. The apostle John so stated 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.

First, *fellowship* necessarily implies “agreement.” As in the crude illustrations given above, it was a matter of not being able to agree with the unacceptable suggestions that prohibited the Christian from participating with the man. One may claim fellowship with another, but if he does not agree with him, he is not in fellowship. If one says

he is not in fellowship with another, but agrees with him, he is in fellowship with him whether he realizes it or not.

John says there is such a thing as *darkness*. Darkness is always contrasted either to Christ Jesus or to righteousness. “Then spake Jesus again unto them, saying, I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life.” (John 8:12). By His declaration that He is the “light of the world,” He dispels the possibility of His followers walking in darkness and at the same time having fellowship with Him. Many will claim that it is not necessary to constantly walk in the light. They alter the Bible definition of fellowship to include that which is shady in character and evil in context, claiming that God’s grace will cover our sins just because we mean well. This sort of humanistic philosophy will not stand. Men cannot flaunt their own base habits before the glorious face of our Lord and entice Him to accept them.

Second, *fellowship* is determined by Jesus. He said if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another” (1 John 1:7). The prerequisite for fellowship is the light of God’s Word. Men would like to place other criteria for defining fellowship, but they can’t. It is the light of God’s Word in which man must walk if he is to be in the favor of God. Since there is no man who can determine the context of fellowship, it is evident that fellowship cannot be the product of man. Mankind was not given the privilege or responsibility of determining what is acceptable to God and what is not. Jeremiah acknowledged, “O LORD, I know that the way of man is not in himself: *it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps*” (Jer. 10:23). God alone determines the bounds of light through His final revelation to man—the Bible.

Therefore, if we are to understand the meaning of fellowship, we must realize that the Bible is the textbook on that subject. That being true, whatever we embrace by way of human conduct, ethics (business or biblical), or worship, must be in harmony with the Bible in order to be acceptable to God.

UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

Just a smattering of biblical knowledge should tell us what “unfruitful works of darkness” are. This, surely, is one of the most glaring confusions expressed by our brethren who like to “live on the edge.” It is indeed strange that people who claim to be God’s children, who

profess to be Christians, and who “go to church” regularly, try their best to find ways to circumvent the plain teaching of the Bible. They ask the question: “What is an unfruitful work of darkness?” This sounds familiar of Pilate when he asked Jesus:

Art thou a king then? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. Pilate saith unto him, What is truth? (John 18:37-38).

Just because Pilate did not know what truth is did not mean there is no such thing as truth. Because men cannot readily define unfruitful works of darkness does not mean they do not exist. Since we are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, it is mandatory that we understand what constitutes such.

John stated in 1 John 4:1, “Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” A false prophet is one who preaches a doctrine different from that revealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul warned the Galatian brethren: “But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed” (Gal. 1:8). Accursed means to be cut off; separated from; denied the fellowship of God. Unfruitful works of darkness can be classified in at least three different categories.

Preaching Error

Those who preach error are engaging in an unfruitful work of darkness. This is what John alluded to in 1 John 4:1, and what Paul stated in Galatians 1:8. These are the teachings of men that are contrary to the Word of God as revealed by the Holy Spirit. Paul emphasized his meaning by saying that if he preached what men wanted to hear, he would not be the servant of God. He further underlined his meaning by saying he was not taught the doctrine he preached, nor did he receive it from man, but by revelation of Christ (Gal. 1:11-12). Jesus condemned human doctrines in Matthew 15:9, “In vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” Jesus said:

Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven. Many will say to me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in thy name? and in thy name have cast out devils? and in

thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you: depart from me, ye that work iniquity (Mat. 7:21-23).

Simple logic should teach one that any doctrine arising after the completion of the New Testament is a teaching not authorized by God. If a teaching does not have the authority of the New Testament, it cannot be the doctrine of Christ.

It is true that, following the completion of the New Testament, men arose teaching false doctrines as Paul said they would (Acts 20:29-30). By the end of the first century, a great departure from truth had already occurred. There has never been a time since that truth was in the majority. A.D. 606 marks the recognized beginning of Roman Catholicism. A.D. 1054 is the accepted date of the division between the Roman Church and the Greek Orthodox Church. Since then hundreds of man-made religious bodies have emerged into what we now know as denominationalism. The entire concept of denominationalism is known as Protestantism. Protestantism is the designation given as the result of *protests* against obvious abuses of the Catholic Church in the early 16th century. Therefore, the three main “branches” of religion in the United States have become generally accepted as “Protestant,” “Catholic,” or “Jew.” The church of our Lord is unceremoniously linked with the “Protestant” groups in that it is neither Catholic nor Jew. It is classed as a denomination in the eyes of the world and, indeed, by more and more influential preachers in the church. In addition, other religions have spawned including Islam, Taoism, Buddhism, Hinduism, Bahai, Shintoism and many more which do not recognize Jesus as the Messiah. They all have other gods they worship.

All such religious bodies have a beginning date and some man, or men, to whom they look as their founders. As sad as it may be, and in spite of the host of souls that will be lost, every one of these man-made organizations classifies as an unfruitful work of darkness.

Also, there are many in the church of our Lord who are teaching doctrines that are not in conformity with the teaching of the New Testament. Many are teaching that denominational bodies are teaching the doctrine of Christ, even though they are not following the Bible. Some even are embracing the teaching of Muhammedanism and Judaism which doctrines reject Jesus as the Messiah. All who

depart from the plain and simple gospel of Christ will suffer eternal condemnation. Jesus negates the plea of men who say people will be saved only because of their sincerity. They claim to be saved separate from their obedience to the gospel.

Today, those who preach any doctrine other than the doctrine revealed by the Holy Spirit and thus authorized by Jesus are preaching false doctrine. All false doctrines are unfruitful works of darkness.

Refusing to Defend Truth

A tragic frame of mind is that of allowing false charges against the church to go unchallenged. Attacks against the church of the Lord are the same as a charge against the Lord, Himself. Saul of Tarsus learned on the road to Damascus that persecuting Christians was the same as persecuting Jesus (Acts 9:4-5). Some believe it is out of Christian character to oppose false teaching. Such an assumption is as false as preaching error, since it is not according to Bible teaching. There are various reasons men suggest for this cowardly thinking: (1) It is not showing love for the erring; (2) We have no right to judge another's belief; (3) We are not sinlessly perfect ourselves; (4) Every person has a different interpretation of Scripture, or we cannot understand the Bible alike; (5) The church is just another denomination, and each has a right to its own belief; and (6) We are all going to heaven, just by different routes. All of these are weak and baseless excuses for a lack of knowledge of God's Word.

The Bible is the criteria for our stance for truth. Paul stated:

For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears (Acts 20:29-31).

Paul, an apostle of Christ, revealed by inspiration that it was necessary to warn people about the dangers of false teaching and false teachers. He also identified by name men who opposed the preaching of the truth (1 Tim. 1:19-20; 2 Tim. 2:17-18). John named Diotrephes (3 John 9), who dominated the church. He warned of false prophets (1 John 4:1). Jude named several *ungodly* people. Peter warned of false teachers (the devil) as "roaring lions" going about seeking whom they may devour. Jesus scathingly denounced the Pharisees for their

hypocrisy (Mat. 23). Those who say it is wrong to openly oppose false teaching and false teachers fly in the face of biblical precedent. Paul confirmed this in his declaration that he had “not shunned to declare unto [them] all the counsel of God” (Acts 20:27). Refusing to defend the truth of God’s Holy Word is an unfruitful work of darkness.

Rejecting the Authority of the Bible

The third category of unfruitful works of darkness can be summarized as all who reject the Bible as God’s inerrant, all-sufficient, once-for-all-delivered-to-the-saints faith. It is not surprising to know this position includes the majority of the world’s population. It is very surprising to observe the departure of so many in the church who are now questioning, or denying altogether, the inspiration and authority of the Scriptures. Everyone knows the exhortation of Paul 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.” All that is necessary for a wholesale departure from the faith is to reject the authority of the Bible. Jesus pronounced eternal judgment on all who reject the gospel (John 12:48). Paul warned the Athenians that Jesus would eventually judge the world in righteousness (Acts 17:31). John recorded the words of Jesus condemning the evil with eternal condemnation and blessing the faithful with eternal life in the resurrection (John 5:28-29).

The penman of Hebrews gave the condition for salvation: “Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered; And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him” (Heb. 5:8-9). Disobedience to the Word of God, namely, the gospel of Christ, automatically prevents one from eternal salvation. Therefore, rejection of the authority of the Bible, the gospel, is an unfruitful work of darkness. The Bible teaches explicitly:

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

It is quite common in our time for the church to be involved with denominations in religious programs. “Pastors” exchanging pulpits (i.e., preachers in the church of Christ exchanging pulpits with denominational preachers), having joint worship services with denominational bodies, Christmas caroling, Easter sunrise services, promoting the Pentecostal-oriented Promise Keepers religion, late-night communion services laced with expressions of belief in the direct operation of the Holy Spirit, even denying the virgin birth of Jesus. The verbal, plenary inspiration of the Scriptures is replaced by “full” inspiration, and the King James version of the Bible is discarded for the original language (meaning only the “intellectual” scholars are capable of interpreting the original languages of Greek, Aramaic, and Hebrew and letting us poor unlearned folks know what God wants us to do! Shades of Catholicism!). The tragedy of all of this is the reality of its presence even while we speak!

BIBLICAL OBLIGATIONS CONCERNING EPHESIANS 5:11

The restrictions involved in our text, Ephesians 5:11, mean something! The great question is: “What do they mean?” To many, they mean nothing. Brethren go about their lives ignoring the obligations the Bible places upon us with regard to those who blatantly disregard the truth. Shall we act as if nothing is amiss in the lives of the unfaithful? Those who disregard the commandments of God and Christ Jesus are effectively telling them and the world they are independent of God’s authority. The weak and cowardly, who try to placate the sinful in their ungodliness, decry efforts of concerned brethren for the welfare of their souls. They cry: “Don’t drive them away with disciplinary actions.” Some hide behind the facade of love saying, “I love people too much to criticize them.” Others dodge the Bible’s exhortation:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

Other biblical commands in this vein include Romans 16:17-18 and 2 John 9-11. These are crucial commands designed to keep the church pure and to bring the sinner to repentance (Jam. 5:19-20).

For the faithful, these obligations are critical. Spiritual relationships are sorely tried. The Christian is placed in the unenviable situa-

tion of maintaining a spiritual relationship with a sinning brother in Christ or possibly severing his association with him. It is, indeed, a serious and traumatic moment. One's love for a brother or sister in Christ is tested. Hearts may be broken and the strongest struggle with emotional attachments to those involved. A decision must be made, however, and the basis for the decision must be the teaching of the Bible. It is a difficult thing to realize and accept that the love one brother or sister in Christ may have for a sinning Christian is expressed to a far greater degree by discipline than it is by emotional tolerance. It takes far more love and courage to urge a sinning brother or sister in Christ to return to the Lord, than it does to not say anything to them about their unfaithfulness.

When the Bible says, "Have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness," there remains no ground upon which we can give indication of our approval of the sinner's conduct. Romans 16:17 reads, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them." Paul commands: "Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 The. 3:6). It is never suggested that the Christian is to have absolutely no contact with the sinner. It does suggest that any sense of toleration or approval be withdrawn from the guilty individual. James tells us:

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him;
Let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of
his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of
sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

Paul concurs: "And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother" (2 The. 3:14-15). Contact must be maintained if any opportunity for restoration is to be gained.

Withdrawal of fellowship is not necessarily the end of the relationship. It is a means to the end. The desired result is to restore the erring to the Lord. Withdrawal of fellowship is to try to impress upon the heart of the individual the seriousness of the condition into which he has brought, or is bringing, upon himself. Any encouragement of the

sinner's conduct would destroy all efforts to impress upon him the significance of the action taken. There is no conflict with the injunction to "have no company with him" (v. 14) and "count *him* not as an enemy." It would be difficult to *reprove* the unfruitful works of darkness if we have no contact at all with the guilty one.

The question arises: "What if the guilty one is a husband or wife, or a child, or parent?" This is a most difficult scenario. Yet, the principle applies to all the ungodly. It does create special problems. One should think hard about the consequences of not abiding by the teaching of the Bible on any matter, including this circumstance. The answer lies in the verses and their teaching referred to previously. No encouragement can be given to the conduct of the sinner. No indication of approval must be indicated on the Christian's part toward the sinful activities of the guilty. The guilty man of 1 Corinthians 5 was not said to have been put out of his father's house, yet there was the stern rebuke and withdrawal of fellowship indicated. Paul ordered the Corinthian brethren to "deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Cor. 5:5). Paul said they should have mourned his conduct:

It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you (1 Cor. 5:1-2).

"Might be taken away from among you" does not necessarily demand exile or banishment from out of their sight, but it does mean they could have no fellowship with him. He was to be taken out of their fellowship. There had to be some kind of contact with him for in 2 Corinthians 2 Paul admonishes the church in Corinth to receive him back into their fellowship because of his evident repentance.

There are obligations demanded in the text under discussion. A person from whom fellowship has been withdrawn must know why this action has been taken. It is not to be assumed that the sinning brother or sister in Christ will automatically know why fellowship is not extended to him. He must be informed first, then entreated, then admonished, then rebuked, then reprovved in Christian compassion before the drastic action of withdrawal of fellowship is enforced. Withdrawal of fellowship is never a pleasant happening, but it is

God's way, the Divine way, of either restoring the erring to the church or purging the church of his sinful influence.

SOME SUMMARY OBSERVATIONS

The church is plagued with many problems which could have and should have been corrected in their infancy. Elders who watch over the flock (Acts 20:28) have an awesome responsibility to keep the church in the "Old Paths." It is their responsibility also to protect the flock from dangers and evils from without. If every eldership in the Lord's churches over the world had the biblical knowledge to detect error and the courage to challenge and defeat the false teaching and the false teacher (Tit. 1:9), we would not be facing the apostasy of our day. The history of God's people trumpets the ever-present danger of falling away.

Our schools of higher education, avaricious preachers, weak and unlearned elders, an ignorant and unchallenged pew, influence of society, peer pressure, and on and on are all hammers that pound upon the anvil of God's Word. Mankind has yet to learn that all the hammers the world can produce will wear out with the using, but the anvil will remain unharmed, unscathed, and eternal.

With all of our hearts let us pray that God's faithful will not have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but will emerge from this life victorious over death, hell, and the grave, as well as over all those who would challenge the love and the power of Almighty God!

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FELLOWSHIP AND 1 JOHN 1

Paul Vaughn



Paul was born in Maysville, Kentucky. He is married to the former Ricki Jett. He attended Maysville Community College, Lexington Technical Institute, and is a 1986 graduate from East Tennessee School of Preaching and Missions.

He worked in mission fields in Ohio and Kentucky for ten years, helping to establish a congregation in Brown County, Ohio and in Jackson, Kentucky. Paul is a debater, editor and publisher. He edited a book on the history of the church in Eastern Kentucky and has written a lesson commentary on the book of Hebrews.

In 1996, Paul and Ricki moved to Marion, Arkansas to work with the Highway 77 Church of Christ.

The fellowship of the New Testament church is braided in obedience to the Lord Jesus Christ. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). A person must abide in the doctrine of Christ to be in fellowship with God, Christ, and the church. Man is individually responsible to God for his actions and his thoughts. God will bring every act and thought of man into judgment, “In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel” (Rom. 2:16). This pronouncement does not mean that Christians are separate receptacles that share neither abundance nor their emptiness with other Christians. Jesus desires Christians to be joined together in fellowship, in the church of Christ with Him and God the Father.

The Scriptures teach that fellowship is important. There are no examples in the Old Testament or the New Testament, of solitary religion. In the New Testament Christians are to assemble together and encourage one another in the work of the Lord. The exhortation in the book of Hebrews shows the need of fellowship. “And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works: Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together” (Heb. 10:24-25). Christians are to: “comfort one another” (1 The. 4:18); “Bear ye one another’s burdens” (Gal. 6:2); “Love one another with a pure heart

ferently” (1 Pet. 1:22); “Confess *your* faults one to another and pray one for another” (Jam. 5:16). In the worship of the church of Christ, the singing builds up the fellowship of congregations. “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord” (Col. 3:16). From these Bible teachings about the need of Christians to be in fellowship, it is easily seen why those who neglect Christian fellowship suffer from poverty of faith and deterioration of Christian character.

Christians need fellowship! Fellowship will enrich their faith and will help them to be stable in their service to the Lord Jesus. No Christian can be successful in his service to God all alone. The stability of Christian fellowship offers opportunity for the world to see Christianity in action.

In the First Epistle of John, chapter one, John is enjoying the rewards of fellowship with God. It is his plea and desire that all Christians enjoy the same fellowship. Christians need to make every effort to maintain the purity and beauty of the fellowship they have with God and fellow Christians, which can only come about with a proper attitude toward God, Christ, and the church of Christ as it is revealed in the Scriptures. There are multitudes that have perverted the fellowship that one reads about in the Scriptures. It is taught throughout “Christianity” that fellowship is of little consequence. Those who teach such doctrines aid Satan in his effort to divide and destroy the church. One can hear slogans such as: “open fellowship,” “unity in diversity,” and “multi-level fellowship” being taught in the Lord’s church today. Those who teach such doctrines draw no lines of fellowship. Their work is an effort to set aside, sidestep, and do away with the safeguards of fellowship that are set forth in the Scriptures.

What can one learn about acceptable fellowship from the First Epistle of John, chapter one?

THE BASIS OF FELLOWSHIP

What is the proper basis for fellowship? There are a great many wrong viewpoints toward the pattern of fellowship as it is given in the Scriptures. The liberal agenda is to attack the doctrine of fellowship that is in the Bible and have open fellowship with many religious groups and persons. They take a perverted view of fellowship, causing

congregations to be in union, not fellowship, with the dark forces of evil.

Fellowship is not based on opinion, inclination, persuasion, conviction, belief, tenet, creed, or the whims of unstable men. The children of God should not elevate the teachings and desires of men above that which is written in the Word of God.

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of *men* above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another (1 Cor. 4:6).

The standard for fellowship is not sincerity, good intentions, sympathy, or faith only. The authority for proper fellowship is God and His Son Christ Jesus, who gave John this standard: "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" (1 John 1:3).

The word *fellowship* indicates the setting aside of one's private wishes and joining in with another for a common purpose. It is a partnership. In Christianity this partnership is based upon the "Word of life" (1 John 1:1). Those who accept the gospel by obedience to it are brought into fellowship with the church of Christ. "And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved" (Acts 2:47). This fellowship is extended into heaven itself, and one is brought into fellowship with God and His Son. It was John's desire that those to whom he wrote would enjoy fellowship with him as he was in fellowship with God and Jesus.

The fellowship which John wrote about is the unity that Jesus prayed for on the night He was betrayed and put on trial. Jesus prayed, "That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21). The unity of fellowship that Jesus prayed for and John desired should be the common goal and aspiration of all who love God. The acceptance of truth, the Word of God, is the only standard that will bring about true Christian unity. One cannot be united with God and Christ Jesus if he is not in obedience with the teaching of the New Testament. In the second epistle to the Thessalonians Paul said the Lord would take vengeance on all who do not obey the gospel. "In flaming fire taking vengeance on them that

know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ” (2 The. 1:8).

WALK IN THE LIGHT

The Scriptures teach that God is light. “This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). Light is His nature, and it is in the splendor of light that all is revealed to man. Academically, light is knowledge. God has knowledge without limit. Jeremiah said, “He hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heaven by his understanding” (Jer. 51:15). The understanding of God is boundless. “Great is our Lord, and of great power: his understanding is infinite” (Psa. 147:5). Morally, light is pure and good. David wrote, “Good and upright is the LORD” (Psa. 25:8). Darkness is sin. It stands for all that is evil and exists in every facet of life. It exists intellectually and morally. Darkness tries to eclipse all that is good, but it is unable to eclipse the light of God!

God is light. Therefore, to be in fellowship with Him one must walk in the light and not in darkness. “If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth” (1 John 1:6). John, in this verse, shows the possibility that even an apostle could walk in the darkness of sin and fall from fellowship with God, when he includes himself with the use of *we*, a first person plural pronoun.

What does it mean to walk in the light? For one to walk in the light, he must be in fellowship with God. Fellowship with God comes from obedience to the Word of God. When one hears the gospel (Rom. 10:17), believes the gospel (John 8:24), repents of his sins (Acts 3:19), makes the good confession that Jesus is the Son of God (Rom. 10:9-10), and is baptized for the remission of sins (Acts 2:38), he is in fellowship with God. As a Christian walks daily in the light, he will regularly confess his sins. The confession of sin allows the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse one of sin. “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” (1 John 1:7).

There are major roadblocks that will hinder the Christian walk. The allurements of the world have caused many Christians to fall out of fellowship with God and the church. Demas is one example of a

Christian who loved the world more than the Lord. "For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world" (2 Tim. 4:10). John said, "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). One cannot walk in the light and have devotion for the world. False teachers have allured too many Christians from their walk with God. It is written that all teaching should be compared with God's Word. "Beloved, believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world" (1 John 4:1). In the sermon on the mount Jesus warned about false teachers, "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves" (Mat. 7:15). Paul warned the church at Ephesus about false teachers that would come and try to destroy the church. "For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them" (Acts 20:29-30). These are but a few of the warnings about false teachers who will try to compromise the unity of the Lord's church and try to destroy fellowship of God's people.

POWER IN THE BLOOD

The source that makes it possible for man to walk in the light and keep walking in the light is the blood of Christ. "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" (1 John 1:7). The prophet Zechariah spoke about the power of the blood of the Messiah. "In that day there shall be a fountain opened to the house of David and to the inhabitants of Jerusalem for sin and for uncleanness" (Zec. 13:1). The great event Zechariah prophesied was the sacrifice of the Son of God. The animals that were sacrificed under the Law of Moses could not keep one in fellowship with God. The New Testament teaches that it was impossible for the blood of bulls and goats to take away sin and keep man in a proper relationship with God. "For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins" (Heb. 10:4). Those animals that were sacrificed were only a shadow of good things to come through Christ Jesus (Heb. 10:1-3). It is through the blood of the Messiah that sins are removed, providing man with the means for fellowship with God. "In whom we have

redemption through his blood, *even* the forgiveness of sins” (Col. 1:14).

Jesus shed His blood to reconcile man to God. Paul stated, “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” (Rom.5:10). Paul goes on to say that it is baptism that puts one into Christ so man can have a new walk. “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life” (Rom. 6:4).

One can see the power of the blood of Christ. It is through His blood that man is redeemed, reconciled, freed, liberated, and emancipated from sin. It is the blood that permits man to be in fellowship with God and the church of Christ. Those who have not come in contact with the power of the blood of Christ Jesus are not in fellowship with God, Christ, or the church for which He died on the cross. They are in the darkness of sin and have not submitted to the Chief Shepherd, who has abundantly provided the way of escape from sin. Sin is missing the mark, the standard that God has set for one to be in fellowship with Him. Those in Christ walk in the light of His will and can have no unity with anyone who has turned his back on the blood of the Lord!

WALKING DAILY

John speaks of a common activity among Christians who are in fellowship with God and the church. “But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light...” (1 John 1:7). The walk that John is speaking about is a daily or continuous walk. It is a particular sphere of activity, a life style that brings glory to God. Paul told the Christians at Rome to yield themselves to God. “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” (Rom. 12:1). This is a continuous and sustained endeavor to walk, live, work, persist, abide, and be active in a life that is in conformity with the will of God. God desires Christians to have a life of activity rather than one empty words. “But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves....But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and continueth *therein*, he being not a forgetful hearer, but

a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed” (Jam. 1:22, 25).

The Christian walk is more than attending the worship service of the church. Yet, if a Christian is walking daily for Christ, he will be active in all the activities of the congregation. This means attending every service possible: Sunday morning, Sunday night, and midweek Bible study. Walking daily in fellowship with God means that one is concerned about lost souls. “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). For one to be in fellowship with God, a love of lost souls is manifested in the carrying out the great commission. “Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature” (Mark 16:15). The daily walk consists of helping those in need of food, water, and housing. One can be condemned for not being active in the Lord’s work in seeing to the needs of the helpless. Jesus said, “For I was an hungred, and ye gave me no meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me no drink” (Mat. 25:42). Christianity is more than setting on a pew three hours a week!

The daily walk of Christians is made possible only through the confession of sin. “For all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God” (Rom.3:23). “If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us” (1 John 1:8). The second law of pardon is for all who have become Christians through baptism for the remission of sin, and then they sin again. John plainly said that all Christians sin at one time or another in their life. This sin is removed by repentance and confession of sin to God. “If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness” (1 John 1:9). The confession of sin makes it possible for Christians to walk daily, and be active in the fellowship with God and all faithful Christians.

THE PRIVILEGE OF EXTENDING FELLOWSHIP

It can be seen from a study of First John, chapter one, that not everyone can be in fellowship with Christ and His church. Before any Christian or church can extend the hand of fellowship to any person or congregation, there are requirements that must be met. The Lord’s church cannot have joint participation or association with any person or congregation that is not in fellowship with God. Christians must not let any man deceive them with vain words and extend fellowship

to those in the darkness of sin. The church of Christ cannot be in fellowship with the works of darkness. The Scriptures teach plainly, clearly, bluntly, unambiguously, and in a straightforward manner that Christians are not to have fellowship with anyone who is not “walking in the light.” Paul said, “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them” (Eph. 5:11).

The writers of the New Testament viewed fellowship as extremely important to the spiritual life of the church. They told the early Christians not to have fellowship with an immoral person (1 Cor. 5:9-13), the disorderly (2 The.3:6), false teachers (2 John 9-11), and those who cause division (Rom. 16:17-18). Yet, the church of Christ has the right, privilege, and the duty to extend fellowship to those who walk in the light. The church must include into fellowship all that God includes and reject all whom God rejects.

There can only be one standard for unity, and that is compliance with the will of God. The Lord’s church must not be tolerant with sin and extend the hand of fellowship to those who compromise the will of God. There will be times when the church must be militant; Jude encouraged Christians to go to war for the faith. “Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort *you* that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). Paul told the Christians at Ephesus to get ready for battle. “Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph. 6:11). Contrary to basic Bible teaching, there is an abundant supply of those who are willing to surrender the faith and open the door of fellowship to those who refuse to walk in the light.

CONCLUSION

The beauty of fellowship and unity of God’s people is something for which every servant of God should diligently work. David understood the need of brethren to dwell together in unity. “Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Psa. 133:1). Unity must be a fellowship based upon the Word of God, or it is no unity at all. Those who extend fellowship with one who is walking in darkness put themselves in darkness and are no longer in fellowship with God. Christians must not become spiritual partners with anyone who is separated from God.

A person's attitudes, beliefs, and practices can endanger his soul. One must be very careful to guard his soul and have no fellowship with those who walk in darkness. There is always the danger of falling from fellowship with God. The apostle Paul was diligent in the care of his soul. "But I keep under my body, and bring *it* into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Cor. 9:27). He goes on to teach, "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12). Those who disregard the safeguards of fellowship put their own souls in danger as well as the souls of those who follow them.

Every effort should be made to keep fellowship pure and beautiful as God intended. Christians live in the world and must function in a place where darkness abounds. Simple reason teaches that not everyone should be in fellowship. Even the most liberal in the Lord's church believe and teach that there can be no fellowship with Satanism, Hinduism, Confucianism, and Humanism. Those religions are religions of men and not of God. But they fail to see that denominationalism comes from the fruit of men, and there can be no fellowship such wickedness.

Today there is a general decline of Bible knowledge. When God's people do not know the will of God, they will be destroyed. Hosea, a servant of God, lived at a time when the nation of Israel enjoyed prosperity and growth, but spiritual adultery permeated the people. They were in fellowship with the darkness of sin. The priests failed to teach the Word of God, the people were blinded to true religion, and they assumed that they were still loyal to God. Their lack of the knowledge of God's Word and His will destroyed them.

My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge: because thou hast rejected knowledge, I will also reject thee, that thou shalt be no priest to me: seeing thou hast forgotten the law of thy God, I will also forget thy children (Hos. 4:6).

The decline of the knowledge of the Scriptures has caused multitudes to be in fellowship with those in the darkness of sin, making spiritual adulterers of all who believed the lies about open fellowship. They too will be destroyed because of the rejection of the knowledge of God and His will for true Christian unity.

John desired for Christians to walk in the light and enjoy the fellowship that he enjoyed with God and with all who are in compliance with His Word. This unity of God's people is the only course that is acceptable in the sight of God.

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FELLOWSHIP AND 2 JOHN 9-11

Tim Nichols



Tim Nichols was born on October 19, 1956, at Barberton, Ohio. Immediately after high school he enlisted in the United States Army for a three-year tour of duty. While stationed in Europe Tim attended the University of Maryland (European Division) for two years. Tim received a B.A. degree in Bible from Harding University in 1981 and a M.S. in Psychology from Frostburg State University in 1989.

Tim preached for the Barrackville Church of Christ in Barrackville, West Virginia, from 1981 to 1983. Since 1983, he has worked with the Keyser Church of Christ in Keyser, West Virginia. He has been a part-time instructor at Potomac State College in Keyser since 1989.

Tim is married to the former Libby Marie Sprout of Parkersburg, West Virginia. They have three children: Ashley, Robert, and Eric.

INTRODUCTION **Doctrine's Importance**

Good doctrine is the brain and spinal cord of the body of Christ. It is the agency through which our Head, Jesus Christ, guides the actions of our hands in doing right, animates our tongues to speak truth, and directs our feet to carry us where we ought to go. The doctrine of Christ restrains our hands from doing evil, our tongues from speaking falsehood, and our feet from taking us where we do not belong. Doctrine informs us of invaluable truths that we otherwise could not discover, it elevates our thoughts beyond the bounds of this world, strengthens our weak hearts, and comforts our sorrowing souls. Good doctrine is not dry, irrelevant, or dreary. It is alive and it enlivens every fiber of our spiritual being because its Author created us, cares profoundly about us, and knows us inside and out.

For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things *are* naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do (Heb. 4:12-13).

Every member, and every part of every member of the body of Christ is engaged in doctrine. Doctrine is not the exclusive possession of the elders, pulpit speaker, or Bible class teacher. Although it is publicly taught by some it must be learned, believed, taught, treasured, and practiced by all.

Doctrine's Substance

It is a mistake to regard doctrine as consisting only of the verbal content of what is publicly taught. One who publicly speaks truth may deny it by the life that he lives or he may teach error in private. One in the pew who passively tolerates the public teaching of truth without gladly receiving it and living according to its precepts, is not truly abiding in the doctrine that he simply allows to bounce off his ear drums. Even one who can always give the correct answer to Bible questions in the Bible class and who can show blue ribbons for Bible-Bowl triumphs is not bringing and abiding in the doctrine of Christ if he or she is not applying those precious principles to life lived in the real world.

Right doctrine is Divinely revealed truth. It is fixed and unchanging (Psa. 119:89, 152, 160). It consists of historical facts, present realities, information concerning future events, promises (and their conditions), instructions, commands, admonitions, warnings, and other ideas to be received, believed, and implemented in the daily life of every Christian. These are all found in our Bibles (2 Tim. 3:16-17; Jude 3; 2 Pet. 1:3-4). They are not found elsewhere (Pro. 30:6; Gal. 1:8-9; Rev. 22:18-19). They are all immensely important (Psa. 119:128). They are subject to being understood (John 8:32; 2 Pet. 3:16).

Because God cares so deeply about our eternal welfare, He demands that we fill our hearts and activate our hands, feet, and tongues with right doctrine—His doctrine (1 Tim. 4:15-16). It will guide us through the difficulties of life (Psa. 19:8; 119:9, 11, 105), give us joy in this present world (Psa. 16:11; 30:5; Isa. 12:3; 61:10; Jer. 15:16; Acts 8:5-8; Rom. 14:17), and take us to be with Him in heaven when this life has ended (Rom. 1:16; 15:4). It is nourishing and good for us in every way (1 Pet. 2:2; 1 John 5:3).

Satan's Doctrines

Satan also has doctrines (1 Tim. 5:15) that are taught by men who are caught in his snare (2 Tim. 2:25-26) and then believed by some who had previously held to God's doctrine (1 Tim. 4:1-3; 2 Tim. 4:2-4). Satan is constantly at work in his attempt to lure God's people into his trap that is baited with false doctrine. You are warned to:

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour: Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world (1 Pet. 5:8-9).

False doctrines are distinguishable from those that are God's. Some of them clearly and directly contradict what has been revealed in the Bible. Others are simply ideas that are not found in the Bible. Both categories are to be scrupulously avoided (1 Pet. 4:11). We must not believe them, teach them, or act upon them. They will lead us down the broad road to destruction and cause us to miss the narrow and strait road that leads to heaven.

Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide *is* the gate, and broad *is* the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: Because strait *is* the gate, and narrow *is* the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it. Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves (Mat. 7:13-15).

The Doctrine of Christ Unites

When Christians are humble enough to simply remain with what God has revealed and to walk together in the light of His Word, they cannot help but be united. Jesus prayed for the unity of those who would humbly and actively believe what the apostles delivered (John 17:20-22). It stands to reason that if we will all:

1. learn from the same inspired book,
2. renounce our presumed right to decide religious matters for ourselves,
3. lay aside all of the decrees of men and religious councils,
4. refuse to accept the arbitrary doctrines of any and all denominations, including the ones our parents and loved-ones have embraced,
5. resolve to replace our **opinions** with what God has **revealed**,

6. and make God's Word, His doctrine, **the one and only standard** by which we arrive at what we believe and practice religiously,

then we will all be members of that body to which Paul wrote when he said:

God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:9-10).

Such unity of purpose and belief is not only desirable—it is commanded by the God of heaven who has seen fit to give us His all-wise and perfect Standard. It is a beautiful thing to be standing shoulder to shoulder and hand in hand with God's people and to say, with David, "*I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts*" (Psa. 119:63). "Behold, how good and how pleasant *it is* for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psa. 133:1). In an ideal world all would bow together at the feet of the all wise God and fill their hearts and minds with His truth alone.

False Doctrine's Divide

But man is a proud creature. He forms opinions upon the basis of his limited experience and training in this world, and he sets those flawed judgments in concrete without consulting the Word of the God who made him. He hears and uncritically accepts the "wisdom" of others who have no greater authority or ability than himself to decide upon matters of truth. His pride, coupled with his ignorance, leaves him in a pitiful condition without Divine guidance.

All the ways of a man *are* clean in his own eyes; but the LORD weigheth the spirits. Commit thy works unto the LORD, and thy thoughts shall be established. The LORD hath made all *things* for himself: yea, even the wicked for the day of evil. Every one *that* is proud in heart is an abomination to the LORD: *though* hand *join* in hand, he shall not be unpunished. By mercy and truth iniquity is purged: and by the fear of the LORD *men* depart from evil. When a man's ways please the LORD, he maketh even his enemies to be at peace with him (Pro. 16:2-7).

Notice what Paul was inspired to write about the inherent **pride** of those who go beyond what they have received. When all are humble enough to simply receive God's revelation, unity is the inevitable

result. No one has the right to boast about or be proud of his discovery of **revealed** truth. When some, however, count themselves scholarly or wise enough to presume to know more than this (and when these draw followers who accept their teaching), disunity is the certain consequence:

Now these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes; that in us ye might learn not *to go* beyond the things which are written; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other. For who maketh thee to differ? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? but if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory as if thou hadst not received it? (1 Cor. 4:6-7).

Proper Disposition Toward Religious Error

The sad and undeniable truth is that men are often proud and often teach what is not the doctrine of Christ. Our love of truth, knowing all of its benefits for mankind, causes us to despise false doctrine. One cannot love good doctrine and remain indifferent toward counterfeit doctrines. “Through thy precepts I get understanding: therefore I hate every false way....I hate *vain* thoughts: but thy law do I love....Therefore I love thy commandments above gold; yea, above fine gold....I hate and abhor lying: *but* thy law do I love” (Psa. 119:104, 113, 128, 163).

It grieves us to see men departing from the faith and teaching what is not right. We take no delight in having to sever spiritual relationships with those who have been our friends and allies in the cause of Christ. “I beheld the transgressors, and was grieved; because they kept not thy word” (Psa. 119:158). “Rivers of waters run down mine eyes, because they keep not thy law” (Psa. 119:136). No matter how much we have loved and admired them; no matter how kind they have been to us; no matter what their positions of influence may be (among brethren or in the world); no matter how personable, charming, or clever they may be, we have a duty to act so as to hinder them in their endeavors that are obstructing the way of truth. We love their souls and the souls of those who might be influenced by them too much to turn aside while they do their work. They, and their followers, are in danger of eternal damnation. “Salvation *is* far from the wicked: for they seek not thy statutes” (Psa. 119:155). Perhaps silence is golden at some points in time, but it is just plain yellow to remain passively dumb in the presence of fatal error. God has a great interest in how we

will respond at such times. The work that He has given to us to do under such circumstances is His work. “*It is time for thee, LORD, to work: for they have made void thy law*” (Psa. 119:126). We are called upon to participate with God in dealing with false teachers so as to encourage their repentance and to minimize their influence. “My zeal hath consumed me, because mine enemies have forgotten thy words” (Psa. 119:139). The Miranda right to remain silent is not ours when God has given us the responsibility to speak.

EXPOSITION OF 2 JOHN 9-11

John was both inspired and personally interested (2 John 1) when he wrote his letter to the “elect lady and her children” in which he said,

And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 6-11).

Rationale for Withdrawal

Notice the **reasons**, given in advance, for the command not to receive the one who transgresses, and does not abide in, or bring the doctrine of Christ. There are many deceivers who would dissuade faithful Christians from walking after His commandments. There was a very real danger that some of those very ones to whom John wrote would lose what they had obtained and not receive the heavenly reward. To believe that we can receive such men without inviting these consequences is naive. “Can a man take fire in his bosom, and his clothes not be burned?” (Pro. 6:27).

Traits of Transgressors

Observe the **characteristics** of those who were not to be received. They are deceitful and dishonest, opposed to Christ, and transgressors of good doctrine. The word translated *transgresseth* in our text means

“to go beyond.” In a general sense, it is not always wrong to go beyond something. The disciples of Jesus *transgressed* or “went beyond” the traditions of men when they failed to ceremonially wash their hands before eating (Mat. 15:1). No sin was involved in this act. The scribes and Pharisees, however, had **sinned** in their transgression of God’s commandment when they had “gone beyond” what God had delivered through Moses (Mat. 15:2). John, in our text, is describing proud men who were not content to simply remain with what God had revealed. They felt free to go beyond the inspired things that are written. Such teaching is not to be tolerated by God’s people. God has built a stone wall around His truth. What is within the wall must be taught, believed, and practiced. What is outside the wall must be rejected. Those who climb over the wall and call upon others to follow must not be received. They have gone beyond God’s boundary.

State of the Endorser of Evil

Note the sad state of the one who violates God’s will and bids God speed to the one who is transgressing. He is a participant in his evil deeds. His endorsement and encouragement make him an accessory to the high crimes of the transgressor. He shares the guilt of the evil doer. Even respected brethren fail to appreciate this fact. A few years ago the church that I serve was prepared to withdraw from a brother who was, without question, guilty of numerous serious and disturbing sins involving both his teaching and practice of Christ’s doctrine, for which he would not repent. He was encouraged by a preaching brother who lives some distance away to simply resign his membership and place membership elsewhere! The brother who encouraged him to do so then promised to write a letter to the receiving congregation “commending” him to their fellowship. When we learned of this intention, we called the preaching brother and asked him if this was so. He agreed that it was. He was aware that the brother in question was to be disfellowshipped if no repentance was expressed. He had no reason to doubt that the man’s sins were real and that they necessitated our acting. He expressed no doubt about these things. When we asked if he was not concerned about becoming guilty of bidding God speed to one involved in such serious error, he replied that he could “do so without any compunction of conscience.” Such brethren need to learn to govern their behavior by God’s objective standard rather than by their own untaught consciences. No matter how they happen

to feel about such things, they become partakers of other men's sins (1 Tim. 5:22) when they bid God speed to unrepentant sinners in such a direct way.

No Partiality

Give attention to the required absence of partiality in the application of this principle. “**Whosoever** transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God” (2 John 9). “If there come **any** unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed” (2 John 10). We have seen and heard brethren who presumptuously and unashamedly devise all manner of exceptions to John's inspired rule. Men have pointed out: the elevated status of some, the anxiety of some who are yet actively engaged in false teaching and practice, the “mitigating circumstances” surrounding the actions of some who yet refuse to repent, and the emotional condition of others who have not ceased their evil. They then suggest that these men should be treated differently than others. Others have refused to follow this teaching of the Scriptures on the basis of nepotism, cronyism, and other obvious political considerations. We have seen such politicians doing more than just disobeying God concerning their own actions; we have felt their wrath when we have attempted to do what God has taught us to do.

Jude (vv. 22-23) does **not** teach us to compassionately receive some of those who are described in our text as we have heard one man demand. These two verses read: “And of some have compassion, making a difference: And others save with fear, pulling *them* out of the fire; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.” Obviously a distinction needs to be made between the false teacher or evil doer who has repented and ceased his wickedness and the one who has not. The former is safe and harmless. The latter is in a perilous position and is injurious to the body of Christ. It is not possible to leave a damned person in his lost state out of compassion. It is not conceivable that we could passively stand by and permit an evil man to rape and pommel the bride of Christ motivated by compassion. Partiality based upon our finite judgment is forbidden (Jam. 2:4; 1 Tim. 5:21). We are not wise enough to go beyond what God has instructed us to do. We should be pleased that God has not given us the responsibility for deciding such things. If we had the right to such judgments, we would never be sure that we had done the best thing. As it stands, we

can be certain of God's approval when we do what He has commanded under the conditions that He has described for us.

Two Choices: Obey or Disobey

This command, like other commands, is one that we either do or fail to do. To do what John commands is to obey God. To fail to do what John commands is to disobey God. There is no middle ground. There is no room for compromise, concession, or negotiation. When the conditions exist that John has described, we have a duty to follow the course that God has prescribed. It is not a matter of having a mere right to withdraw; we have the solemn responsibility to do so. Continued fellowship with the one not to be received is a thing to which we have no right.

Some Implications

This command implies that the doctrine of Christ can be distinguished from all other doctrines—doctrines of men and of demons—and that we can recognize when someone is teaching or practicing false doctrine. Whenever God says, in effect, that under such and such conditions you are to do thus and so, we can be certain that the described conditions can be discerned. Otherwise we accuse God of setting us adrift in a sea of uncertain subjectivism and of commanding the impossible.

Not With Invisible Ink

We are **not** taught to mark such a one with invisible ink. It seems that some have, at least subtly, suggested that to *mark* (Rom. 16:17) simply means to “take note of” and does not imply making the offenses known publicly. Similarly, one might read our text and conclude that not receiving the transgressor is only a private and silent act. Although few actually teach this with their words, many seem to teach it by their practice. A brother, fairly recently, suggested that I ought to have nothing to do with a particular congregation because of various alleged errors involving the preacher there. When I asked him to provide me with the facts in writing, he seemed almost offended that I would ask for such a thing. His judgment that they ought to be avoided, given without the **reasons** for that judgment, were enough (as far as he was concerned). He was not willing to make any public statement concerning his own withdrawal, and he was not willing to even privately provide the facts that others would need in order

determine their own duty in the matter. The brother in question may or may not have been guilty of wrong, but he was being judged and disfellowshipped without his clear knowledge and without an opportunity to respond to the “hidden” charges or to be encouraged to repent. Strangely enough, when I later publicly explained my reasons for refusing fellowship to another brother who had, without question, involved himself, over a long period of time, in some very serious sins without showing any sign of cessation or repentance after the first and second (and third and fourth...) admonition, this brother who had whispered his own withdrawal to me, along with others who had joined him in his silent withdrawal, condemned my behavior and suggested that such things “ought to be held close to the vest.” Notice, however, that John is writing to Christians collectively and says “Look to yourselves,” “If there come any unto you” (*you* is plural), “receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed” (*receive* is second person plural, *your* is supplied, *bid* is second person plural). This action of non-reception is to be practiced jointly. This, of necessity, implies communication concerning the offenses for which the transgressor is not being received. Public exposure is an essential part of our jointly obeying this command. The same could be said for Romans 16:17 and many other passages dealing with the withdrawal of fellowship. Marking the false teacher or practitioner of truth cannot be done with invisible ink.

PRACTICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND THOUGHTS

Aim to Please God

We might as well get used to the apparent fact that there will always be someone standing nearby ready to judge the **manner** in which we have practiced discipline. Discipline involves difficult choices that must be made in light of God’s commands. The local church must act with ears and hearts turned toward God rather than toward those who grant themselves the right and ability to judge from a distance or from human standards. It is almost inevitable that appeals will often go out to sympathizers outside of the local church. Men who have seen and heard nothing will sometimes feel free to revise the history of events and to distort, for the consumption of others, what you have witnessed. The Biblical approach to discipline is for elders and members to carefully and prayerfully review the facts

and the scriptures, and then do their duty. The only opinion poll that will matter in the end is the one taken in Heaven.

Encourage Genuine Repentance

We are sometimes faced with the question of what to do with what appears to be feigned repentance when the evildoer continues in his sin. We have seen men “go forward” and tell us that “if” they have done wrong, they wish to be forgiven. These have sometimes then increased their level of evildoing, expecting that their former behaviors will never be mentioned again and that their new ones will not be challenged. One such brother, after several “rounds” of this performance, demanded that his former activities could not be mentioned again for two reasons: “Number one,” he said, “I have repented of those things, and, number two, I never did them!” This would be almost humorous if it were not so often repeated in churches across the land. While we cannot put words into a repentant man’s mouth, it does seem that, if we are to help such a one to heaven, we might reasonably ask if he has repented of the specific sins that we are aware of his having committed. Those who have truly repented of their evil should be more than willing to acknowledge the sins that they are forsaking. Others can be expected to equivocate. The decision about what kind of limited and nebulous statement of repentance can be accepted must, of necessity, be made by the local church where those intimately involved are aware of previous and current behavior. No others are qualified to judge.

Games People Play

Some of the machinations of men behind the scenes need to be brought out into the light and openly, candidly, and reasonably examined. The church of our Lord is not a game. It is not a political arena that is governed by cloak-and-dagger political rules. It is not a sporting event with human umpires. It is not a business governed by cheap manipulation and clandestine negotiations. Christ is our Head. His methods and procedures must be meticulously followed. Men, however, often attribute to themselves greater wisdom than that of our Lord when they contrive techniques and maneuvers that, in effect, make void the Word of God.

One instance went something like this. A man was holding a meeting in a church that was plagued with internal difficulties. Sides

had been chosen and he determined that one side was in the right. He went to those whom he believed to be in the right and asked them to “go forward” and make some statement to the effect that “if” they had done wrong, they wanted to be forgiven. After obtaining their agreement to do this, he went to the group that he believed to be in the wrong, told them that the others were going to publicly repent, and asked them to do the same thing in the name of being conciliatory. A horde of “penitent” brethren went forward that night, but no one, apparently, repented of anything. A preacher was able to report a great number of responses. Troubles temporarily died down. Evil-doers went unchallenged and soon resumed their former activities.

This sort of thing seems to be repeated quite often. In my limited experience I have personally known of several instances in which preachers have coached sinners concerning how to “repent” without repenting. It is a shame and a travesty equal to that of the scribes and Pharisees to whom Jesus said, “Why do ye also transgress the commandment of God by your tradition?” (Mat. 15:3b), and “Thus have ye made the commandment of God of none effect by your tradition” (Mat. 15:6b). Any human scheme that sidesteps God’s demands is presumptuous and evil.

Another scheme that we have seen practiced involves what I will call counterfeit commendation. After a troubler has (by specific, identifiable, and sinful acts) begun to tear the body of Christ apart in one place, the elders or others find some way to get him to leave and worship elsewhere either by behind-the-scenes political pressure or even by directly recommending such to him. They then send him to the next church with a glowing letter of commendation. They seem to feel that their problem has been solved when, in reality, they have contributed to the deeper, festering infection of the body of Christ by their dishonesty and neglect of duty. We have seen such brethren patting one another on the back and extolling one another for using such wisdom, tact, and diplomacy. They ought to be admonishing one another to conform to the will of the God, who is watching from above.

A Few Attempts to Limit the Application of the Passage

Some labor very hard to severely limit the application of this and all other passages concerning discipline. Some have suggested that the “doctrine of Christ” refers only to the doctrine about the incarnation

of Christ. This interpretation is not warranted by the context. Although verse seven suggests that some were challenging this specific truth, such a fact can not make the “doctrine of Christ” so narrow. The incarnation is only a part of the doctrine of Christ. The doctrine of Christ is that teaching which proceeds from Him (Mark 11:18). His doctrine is His Word (Luke 4:32; John 18:19-21). His doctrine is the doctrine of God the Father (John 7:28-29). The sermon on the mount was a part of this doctrine (Mat. 7:22). His teaching in the synagogue was the doctrine of Christ (Mark 1:22). His parables are the doctrine of Christ (Mark 4:2). Similarly, the “doctrine of the Pharisees” (Mat. 16:12) was not merely doctrine about the Pharisees. It was that doctrine that proceeded from them. Clearly, anyone teaching that Jesus did not come in the flesh was teaching a specific thing that was not the doctrine of Christ. They did not get their misinformation from Jesus. Neither does anyone else who teaches anything other than what has been revealed by God.

Another limitation that some have attempted to impose on this verse, and other Scriptures dealing with discipline, involves the nature of the offense under consideration. Some have suggested to me that it is wrong to publicly mark those who are guilty of sins other than verbally teaching false doctrine. They seem to hold that Christians can live immoral lives, spread slanderous lies, personally attack brethren by such lies, and whatever else they choose to do, with impunity, as long as they are not publicly teaching false doctrine. The only argument they attempted for this position was a series of rhetorical questions such as, “Do you **always** respond to **every** personal attack?” Of course, no one but a pit bull dog could answer in the affirmative. The implied conclusion seemed to be that, since we do not respond to all, we ought not respond to any matters that do not involve the public teaching of false doctrine. This argument would have saved the brother in Corinth who had his father’s wife from church discipline, but it would have condemned him, uncorrected, to eternal damnation. This argument would have protected Diotrephes, whose outward sins were entirely personal attacks, from the pen of John (3 John 10), but it would not have helped him to go to heaven. Truly, actions speak louder than words, and those who practice evil are in need of the same help afforded those who merely speak untruth.

CONCLUSION

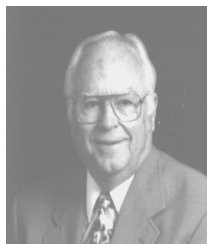
Right doctrine is our lifeline to heaven. It is God's compassionate hand extended to us in measureless mercy. We want to persuade all men and women to take hold of it. We must do all that we can to stop those who would slap the hand away by denying the truthfulness of it. We are required to keep it before mankind and to do battle with those who would pervert it and lead God's people away from it.

Right doctrine is the point of contact between the fallible, finite human mind and the infallible, infinite Divine mind. It is the light that shines in an otherwise dark world. May we dedicate our lives to learning it, teaching it, and guarding it.

Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end; While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation (Heb. 3:12-15).

FELLOWSHIP AND SINGING

Guss Eoff



Guss Eoff, Jr. was born March 7, 1923, in Fort Worth, Texas. In February of 1942, he married Lia Laine Norris. They have one son, Larry, also a gospel preacher. Guss began preaching in 1942.

Guss attended Pepperdine College in Los Angeles and Southwest State Teachers College in San Marcos, Texas. He has preached for local congregations in California, Oregon, Texas, Oklahoma, Louisiana, North Carolina, and Missouri. He also has preached in over twenty-five countries and twenty-six states. He served as a missionary in Hong Kong for two years.

In 1974, he went on a preaching Safari in Tanzania, East Africa, that covered 20,000 miles before he returned home. In 1995, he held his tenth campaign in Malaysia and Singapore and conducted a Soul Winning Work Shop.

He conducted the first television program for churches of Christ in Northern California and has conducted weekly programs in California and Texas. He also conducted daily radio programs as well as weekly programs in California, Oregon, Texas, and Louisiana.

In February, 1993, Guss and his wife of fifty-two years, Laine, moved to Mathis, Texas to work with the congregation there. He speaks on about six lectureships each year.

INTRODUCTION

The theme for this year's lectureship is *Christian Fellowship*, and it is appropriate to begin with a definition of the word.

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *FELLOWSHIP*?

The Greek word *koinonia* is translated "fellowship."

KOINONIA (κοινωνία) (a) communion, fellowship, sharing in common (from *koinos*, common) is translated "communion" in 1 Corinthians 10:16; Phi. 6, R.V., "fellowship," for A.V., "communion," it is most frequently translated "fellowship;" (b) that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution., eg., Romans 15: 26; 2 Corinthians 8:4.¹

κοινωνία, -ας, ἡ, (κοινωνός), fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse; in the N.T. as in class. Grk.²

Koinonia comes from an adj. Which means "common," and like "communion," its literal meaning is a common participation or sharing in anything. Similarly, in the N.T. the concrete noun *Koinonos* is used of a partner in ownership of a fishing-boat (Luke 5:10); the verb

Koinonein of sharing something with another, whether by way of giving (Romans 12:13; Galatians 6:6) or of receiving (Romans 15:27; 1 Timothy 5:22); and the adj. *Koinonikos* (1 Timothy 6:18) is rendered “willing to communicate.”³

Thus we can see that **communion** or **fellowship** means a common participation or sharing in anything. It is used in at least four ways in the New Testament. Paul uses the word **communion** in 1 Corinthians 10:16-17. Here the apostle has reference to the Lord’s Supper, in which there is communion with the body and the blood of Christ. The word **fellowship** is used in Acts 2:42, “And they continued stedfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.”

The first-century Christians had joint participation in these four things: (1) in Christ (1 Cor. 1:9), (2) breaking of bread (Lord’s Supper; 1 Cor. 10:16), (3) ministering to the saints (2 Cor. 8:4), (4) the furtherance of the gospel (Phi. 1:5).

New Testament Christians had *fellowship* in contributions (Rom. 12:13; 1 Tim. 6:18; 2 Cor. 8:4; Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13). This collection was a common participation. The Christians at Philippi had *fellowship* in the furtherance of the gospel (Phi. 1:5).

This chapter will use **fellowship** in the sense of common participation. The second part of the subject deals with singing. Let us consider:

WHAT DO WE MEAN BY *SINGING*?

In Ephesians 5:19 and Colossians 3:16 the word **sing** comes from the Greek *ode* and *ado*.

In the New Testament *Ode* or *Ado* occur only four times in the Pauline writings and six times in Revelation, with both noun and verb together in Revelation. (cf. Eph. 5:19; Col. 3:16; Rev. 5:9; 14:3; 15:3). Revelation 5:9 indicates that the reference is always to a song that is sung: “And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open its seals, for thou wast slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood men of every tribe, and tongue and people and nation.”⁴

The Pauline writings twice allude to songs in discussion of man’s spiritual activity. Rather than be drunk with wine, the Ephesian Christians are urged to “be filled with the Spirit, addressing one another in Psalms and Hymns and Spiritual songs (*psalmois kai hymnois kai odais pneumatikais*), singing and making melody (*adontes kai plallontes*) to the Lord with all your heart, always and

for everything giving thanks in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ to God the Father” (Eph.5:18ff).⁵

Colossians 3:16 likewise sees singing as a means of edification and praise: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as you teach and admonish one another in all wisdom, and as you sing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs (*psalmois hymnois odais pneumatikais*) with thankfulness in your hearts to God.” Whilst pointing out that it is impossible to differentiate exactly between the three terms used here, E. Lohse says that, “Taken together, they describe the full range of singing which the Spirit prompts.”⁶

There can be no argument as to what singing is. Even the dictionary explains what singing is.

To produce musical tones by means of the voice, especially the human voice; to utter words in musical tones, and with musical inflections and modulations—to produce, especially in a proper and skilled manner, tones generated by vibrations of the vocal cords and resonated by the cavities of the mouth, nose, etc.⁷

While the subject of this chapter is not to deal with the words “psalms,” “hymns,” and “spiritual songs,” or with the instrumental music per se, those subjects are related to sings. It is always appropriate to point out that nowhere in the New Testament is there one word about instrumental music in the worship of Christians. Search as one may, nowhere from Matthew, chapter one, verse one to Revelation, chapter twenty-two, verse twenty-one is instrumental music mentioned in the worship of the church. But the subject is “fellowship and singing.”

We have found what *fellowship* is, and we know what *singing* is. So let us notice the passages that deal with singing in the church of our Lord.

PASSAGES DEALING WITH CHRISTIANS SINGING

The following passage deals with a prophecy concerning the Gentiles glorifying God. “And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy; as it is written, Therefore will I give praise unto thee among the Gentiles, And sing unto thy name” (Rom. 15:9). This passage does not authorize instrumental music, but only singing.

Now consider another verse that deals with singing. The apostle Paul pens: “What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also” (1 Cor. 14:15). Paul makes it very plain that he will have the proper spirit when he prays and when he sings. It

must be noticed that the apostle is speaking of singing. Nothing is intimated about instruments being used in the offering of prayers or singing.

The next verse for our consideration is found in Ephesians 5:19: “speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody with your heart to the Lord.” It must be noticed that joint participation is involved in the singing of these spiritual songs. The apostle describes brethren as “speaking one to another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” This was not done by one group speaking to another group, such as is done by a choir singing to an audience. This was fellowship in song; it was joint participation in singing.

Another observation concerning this passage is that no instrumental music is mentioned. The music is vocal: singing! The only instrument that is mentioned in this verse is the heart. Every child of God can make this melody in his heart. He can also express this melody of heart by the use of his voice, unless he is physically hindered.

The apostle Paul uses another verse that parallels Ephesians 5:19. When we compare the teaching of Colossians 3:16 with what Paul says in Ephesians 5:19, some things are made clear. Notice Colossians 3:16: “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly; in all wisdom teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts unto God.” How interesting it is to notice Ephesians 5:18, which says, “And be not drunken with wine, wherein is riot, but be filled with the Spirit.” Then in the parallel passage in Colossians 3:16, Paul says, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly.” It is evident that being “filled with the Spirit” and “let the word of Christ dwell in you richly” have reference to the same thing. Then Ephesians 5:19 mentions: “speaking one to another” while Colossians 3:16 amplifies the former verse with “teaching and admonishing one another.” Here again we have joint participation, fellowship of saints.

What are they having fellowship in? In Ephesians 5:19 they are speaking to one another “in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs.” In Colossians 3:16 the saints are “teaching and admonishing one another with psalms *and* hymns *and* spiritual songs.” Obviously, they were having communion in psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. But, how

were they teaching and admonishing each other in spiritual songs? Paul gives the answer! In both verses brethren did so by *singing*.

Singing was the means by which saints were “making melody with your heart to the Lord” (Eph. 5:19). The parallel in Colossians 3:16 says “singing with grace in your hearts unto God.” “Singing and making melody with your heart” is exactly the same thing as “singing with grace in your hearts.” It is one thing to “sing” and another “to make melody in the heart.” The “making melody with the heart” must accompany the “singing”; otherwise, the singing would not be acceptable.

This is a fellowship, a joint participation, in praise to God and teaching and admonishing each other. Thank God! Christians can have fellowship in so many things. They are made stronger in living the Christian life; they can withstand temptations of Satan; they can spread the gospel to the lost.

As we consider the subject of singing in this lesson, another verse must be considered that mentions singing: “But about midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns unto God, and the prisoners were listening to them” (Acts 16:25). Here, two Christians are singing hymns unto God. This is joint participation, fellowship, of saints singing hymns of praise to God. There are no instruments being played, but both were singing.

In the book of James we find that the word **sing** is mentioned. “Is any among you suffering? Let him pray. Is any cheerful? Let him sing praise” (Jam. 5:13). This verse applies to an individual, one who is cheerful. It was not intended to be applied to a congregation of saints in worship, thus, would not be used in the sense of “fellowship” or joint participation. Let it also be noticed that no instrumental music is played.

OTHER CASES OF FELLOWSHIP IN SONG

After our Lord had established the Lord’s Supper in Matthew 26:26-29 and Mark 14:22-25, the disciples sang a hymn. Let us notice the two verses that mention what took place: “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives” (Mat. 26:30). “And when they had sung a hymn, they went out unto the mount of Olives” (Mark 14:26). Both of these verses show that the disciples had fellowship in singing. This is another example of joint participation in singing.

There are several references to fellowship in singing in the book of Revelation. It must be remembered that this book is written in figurative language. The first reference is in Revelation 5:9. Reference is here made to heaven and the throne (Rev. 4:2, 9; 5:6-7).

And they sing a new song, saying, Worthy art thou to take the book, and to open the seals thereof: for thou was slain, and didst purchase unto God with thy blood *men* of every tribe, and tongue, and people, and nation, and madest them *to be* unto our God a kingdom and priests; and they reign upon earth (Rev. 5:9-10).

Singing was done by the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders. It is stated that they each had a harp and golden bowls full of incense. The incense represented “the prayers of the saints.” What the harps represent must be praise. We know that it was not a literal bowl of incense or a literal harp. Such literal things will not be in heaven any more than literal horses (Rev. 6:2), for flesh and blood cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven (1 Cor. 15:50). Neither the literal harp nor the burning of incense were a part of New Testament worship, but in the vision they symbolize praise and prayers of the saints.

In Revelation 14:2 John says he heard a voice from heaven. He describes the voice as the voice of many waters, as the voice of great thunder, as the voice of harpers harping with their harps. It must be noticed that the voice from heaven was not many waters but rhythmic as many waters. The voice was not thunder but as a great thunder in volume. The voice was not harpers but as sweet and melodious as harpers harping with their harps. No doubt this was the voice of the multitude who came out to the great tribulation. Regardless of the things mentioned here from heaven, they were not literal—not literal water, not thunder, not harps.

The same is true of Revelation 15:2. Those standing by the sea of glass mingled with fire were, no doubt, those whose faith had been tested, and they are given “harps of God.” The harps no doubt symbolize praise. There is no literal sea of glass, but this must symbolize a calm—calm enjoyed by those who had overcome in the conflict with the beast and his image. They had faithfully endured the fiery trials and now were to praise God! Notice they sing, joint participation, in a song saying:

And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, O Lord God, the Almighty; righteous and true are thy ways, thou King of the ages.

Who shall not fear, O Lord, and glorify thy name? for thou only art holy; for all the nations shall come and worship before thee; for thy righteous acts have been made manifest (Rev. 15:3-4).

CONCLUSION

How wonderful to have fellowship, communion, joint participation with children of God in singing. It is one of the many blessings enjoyed by those born again in Christ Jesus our Lord.

ENDNOTES

¹W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* (London, United Kingdom: Oliphants Ltd., 1940), 2:90.

²Joseph Henry Thayer, *Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Associated Publishers, n.d.), p. 352.

³James Hasting, *Dictionary of the Bible* (New York, NY: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1909), p. 150.

⁴Colin, Brown, *Dictionary of New Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1967), 3:673.

⁵*Ibid.*, p. 674.

⁶*Ibid.*, p. 675.

⁷*Webster's New International Dictionary* (Springfield, MS: G. C. Merriam Company, 1955), 4:2343.

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FELLOWSHIP AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Garry Barnes



Garry Barnes is a native of Fulton, Mississippi. He married the former Linda Scott of Sherman, Mississippi, in 1963, and they have two daughters, Debra and Sondra, and six grandchildren.

He attended Freed-Hardeman College and International Bible College. Garry has been preaching since 1964. He has worked with congregations in five states and has preached in gospel meetings. He was the director of the Fourth Annual South Georgia Bible Lectures at the Ashburn Church of Christ in Ashburn, Georgia. He has done campaign mission work in the States and abroad. Garry has written weekly newspaper articles along with articles for brotherhood publications. Garry is presently working with the Carriage Oaks Church of Christ in Bossier City, Louisiana.

Fellowship is a very fragile and precious privilege and blessing. We enjoy fellowship in the family and in social realms. The greatest fellowship is that enjoyed by a child of God with the Father, Jesus Christ our Savior, and other Christians. The first century disciples continued in this fellowship (Acts 2:42). It is a serious thing to lose part in this fellowship. *Fellowship* may be defined in the following ways:

koinoneo...AV - be partaker 5, communicate 2, distribute 1; 8...{κοινωνέω} 1) to come into communion or fellowship with, to become a sharer, be made partner to enter into fellowship, join one's self to an associate, make one's self a sharer or partner.¹

koinonia...1) fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse 1a) the share which one has in anything, participation 1b) intercourse, fellowship, intimacy.²

koinōnós, koinōnéō, koinōnía, synkoinōnós, synkoinōnéō. A. The Meaning and Construction of the Terms. *koinōnós* means "fellow," "participant." *koinōnéō* means 1. "to share in" and more rarely 2. "to impart."³

The subject of this lesson is fellowship and the Lord's Supper. This lesson is not a discussion on **Closed** (strict) and **Open** fellow-

ship. In the denomination world **closed** fellowship is the limiting of the partaking of the Lord's Supper to those within their own specific faith or religious body. **Open** fellowship is allowing participation in the Lord's Supper to those of other faiths or religious bodies. This doctrine among denominational churches hinges on a question of the role of baptism and whether it is a sacrament (church ordinance) or whether it is a condition of discipleship.

We must teach and practice the truth in relation to the Lord's Supper and every other Bible subject, but we are not police of the communion of our Lord and Savior. The truth is that Bible teaching is neither of the above practices. It is the Lord's table; He neither invites those who have never obeyed the gospel to partake, nor rejects them from partaking. If one outside of Christ does partake of the elements of the Lord's Supper, he does not have fellowship with Christ, but only eats of that much bread and fruit of the vine. One known to not be a child of God who continues to partake of the Lord's Supper should be taken aside privately and taught the "way of the Lord more perfectly." We have not and will not walk the aisles and question the faithfulness or membership of each person who attends our services. That role of judgement rests in the hands of an all-knowing and righteous God.

This chapter will define the role the Lord's Supper can have in our fellowship of those outside the body of Christ and those within the Lord's church who persist in error.

THE LORD'S SUPPER

Let us begin by noticing the **meaning** and **purpose** of the Lord's Supper. It was instituted by Jesus at the Passover feast the night of His betrayal (Mat. 26:26-29). Its meaning and purpose are closely related. The Passover feast was the Jewish remembrance of the Lord sparing the first born of Israel as the Jews prepared to flee from Egypt. Christ is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The elements of the Lord's Supper, the unleavened bread and the fruit of the vine, represent the body and blood of Christ given for us on the cross of Calvary (Luke 22:18-20). Thus, its meaning is to represent Christ's body and blood given for us.

Its purpose is to call our remembrance of that sacrifice that Christ made for us. Paul shows this in his first letter to Corinth.

For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup (1 Cor. 11:23-28).

Paul gives strong warning in these Scriptures against partaking of this communion without the remembrance of its meaning. He warns that partaking of it improperly is to be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. This emphasis is sufficient reason to realize that it has a role in our fellowship.

FELLOWSHIP AND THE LORD'S SUPPER

Any discussion of the Lord's Supper and fellowship will have to relate in some way to the meaning and purpose of the Lord's Supper. The practices of some affect our fellowship with them in the Lord's Supper. There are two major areas this point would cover: (1) It would cover those engaged in false teaching and religious practices **not** directly related to the observance of the Lord's Supper, and (2) it would cover those teaching and practicing error directly relating to the Lord's Supper.

Scriptures dealing directly with this topic are limited, and brotherhood writings are sparse.

I speak as to wise men; judge ye what I say. The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? For we *being* many are one bread, *and* one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread. Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar? What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? But I *say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils (1 Cor. 10:15-21)

Paul in these Scriptures gives a biblical foundation from which to start the first area of our discussion—the Lord's Supper and fellowship with those teaching and practicing religious error **not** directly related to the Lord's Supper.

Paul writes to the Corinthians in reference to their partaking of the Lord's Supper and at the same time going to places of idol worship and eating things sacrificed to idols. He asks in verse sixteen, "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?" To illustrate the fellowship we have with Christ in partaking of the cup and bread he uses the parallel between fleshly Israel and the fact that they in eating the sacrifice were partakers of the altar (v. 18). Paul said, "I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils" (1 Cor. 10:20).

The writers of *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia* on pages 688 and 689 say the acts of fellowship mentioned in the New Testament are of four kinds. They are the Lord's Supper, communism, contributions, and cooperation. Here are their comments on the area of fellowship and the Lord's Supper.

Our information concerning the nature of the fellowship involved in the observance of this sacrament is confined to the single notice in 1 Cor. 10:16-17. "The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not a communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not a communion of the body of Christ?" Owing to the presence of the material elements in the sacrament there is a temptation to limit the word for communion to the sense of partaking. This, however, does not entirely satisfy the requirements of the context. The full significance of the term is to be sought in the light of the whole section (vs. 14-22).... By partaking of the cup and the bread the communicants are linked together in unity: "We, who are many, are one bread, one body: for we all partake of the one bread."⁴

Paul in this text has the direct application to the actual sacrifice to idols. It does the Scriptures no injustice to apply this to false doctrines and practices. Jesus states that we cannot serve two masters in Matthew 6:24. In Matthew 12:30, He says that those not for Him, are against Him. In Romans 6:16 Paul asserts that we are the servants of the one we obey. When the Jews would not hear and receive Jesus' teaching, He told them they were of their father the devil in John 8:44.

Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:12-15, speaks of false teachers as Satan's ministers, who fashioned themselves as ministers of righteousness. Paul charges the church at Rome to "mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 6:17).

We can apply the teaching of oneness and unity found in 1 Corinthians 11:15-21 on fellowship and the Lord's Supper to false teachers today who threaten that unity. If we fellowship those who practice false doctrines, are we not seeking a "unity" with them? The point is undeniable. If we fellowship those who are in open rebellion to God and His Word by teaching error, we are partakers of their error (2 John 9-11). If we have fellowship with them, then we would be seeking to have communion with Christ in the church and in partaking of the Lord's Supper, and fellowship with false teachers at the same time. That is exactly what Paul condemns in 1 Corinthians 10. Consider what Jerome in his commentary says about the oneness and unity of the faithful in partaking of the Lord's Supper.

the cup of blessing: The third ritual cup of the passover meal, over which the ritual thanksgiving was pronounced, was called the cup of the blessing (kôš šel berākāh). *the bread which we break:* The early Christians called the Eucharist "the breaking of the bread" (Acts 2:42; Mk 14:22). *communion:* Koinōnia, "fellowship." Through eating the bread and drinking the cup Christians are united to Christ in an intimate fellowship, because the Eucharist is his body and blood (11:27-31). From this Eucharistic fellowship with Christ follows the real union of all the faithful with one another in one body. Baptism incorporates the Christian into the body of the Risen Lord.⁵

First Corinthians 11:20-34 is our biblical foundation to discuss the Lord's Supper and fellowship as it relates to those who teach false doctrine that directly relates to the Lord's Supper.

When ye come together therefore into one place, *this* is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before *other* his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise *you* not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the *same* night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake *it*, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also *he took* the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my

blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink *it*, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink *this* cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of *that* bread, and drink of *that* cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. For this cause many *are* weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come (1 Cor. 11:22-29).

Paul's primary concern to the church at Corinth was that they remember the purpose of the Lord's Supper and their partaking of it. He makes it plain: for them to forget this purpose is to partake of the Lord's Supper unworthily and brings damnation to themselves since they are not discerning the Lord's body (vv. 27-29). The purpose the Bible gives for our partaking the Lord's Supper is to bring to remembrance Christ giving His body and shedding His blood on the cross. To make a common meal of it, as the Corinthians did, is to forget that purpose. Now, considering the purpose for the Lord's Supper, let us think about fellowship and those who teach and practice the Lord's Supper different from what the Scriptures teach.

First, consider the Bible's teaching regarding the observance of the Lord's Supper. Having already studied the purpose of the Lord's Supper, let us note that it was instituted by the Lord at the Passover feast before His crucifixion (Mat. 26:26-29; Mark 14:21-25). In instituting the Supper, Jesus said the bread was His body and the cup was His blood of the New Testament which was shed for many for the remission of sins. This authorizes the elements of the Lord's Supper: unleaven bread and the fruit of the vine. There are no other elements God authorizes. To further emphasize this point, Paul reminds those at Corinth (1 Cor. 11:23-25) of the words of Jesus the night of the Passover feast in Matthew and Mark. Nothing can take the place of these two elements, the bread and the fruit of the vine. If we were to fellowship those who would change these elements, we would be fellowshiping those who would change the whole meaning of the

Lord's Supper. We would not be discerning the Lord's body, and we would be helping destroy the unity of His spiritual body the church.

The Scriptures also teach the day we are to observe the Lord's Supper. The Bible authorizes by direct statements, implication, and examples. The Bible authorizes both by example and implication that the Lord's Supper is to be partaken by the saints each Lord's day. The first day of the week (Sunday) is the day of the Lord's resurrection (Luke 24:1, John 20:1), when the Sabbath was past (Mark 16:1). On the day of Pentecost (the day after the seventh Sabbath, i.e., Sunday, the first day of the week) 3,000 souls were added to the church. In Acts 2:42 they "continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread." To be able to continue steadfast in a practice, that practice has to be in existence. The church at Troas came together on the first day of the week to break bread (Acts 20:7). Paul implies the primary purpose of the Corinthian church coming together was to "eat the Lord's supper" (1 Cor. 11:20). One cannot find any reference in the Scriptures of the New Testament church partaking the Lord's supper on any other day. When worshippers partake of the Lord's Supper on any day other than Sunday, they do so without Bible authority. By doing so, they take away the relationship between the death and resurrection of Christ, and the partaking of the Supper in remembrance of Christ's sacrifice. Paul, in 1 Corinthians 11:27, says, "as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come." Therefore, we cannot offer fellowship to those who so teach and practice.

A teaching done by some in the Lord's church today is that "one" cup and "one loaf" must be partaken of by the entire assembly. Those who so practice deny fellowship to those of us who use more than one cup and have a broken loaf (bread). They base their practice on a misuse of Jesus's statement in Matthew 26:27, "And he took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave *it* to them, saying, Drink ye all of it." Jesus was not emphasizing the literal or physical cup, and makes this plain by His statement in verse 28. Jesus continues, "This is my blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins." Thus, Jesus shows He meant the contents of the cup, the fruit of the vine, which symbolizes His shed blood. Do we drink the literal blood of Christ as the Catholics teach? NO! Some of those who argue for the teaching of one container contend there are three elements of the

Lord's Supper, the bread, the fruit of the vine, and the cup. The Bible only gives two. Paul told the Corinthians, "As often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come" (1 Cor. 11:26). We cannot fellowship those who bind what God has not bound.

Finally, the liberals contend we are to be united in "the gospel"—that is, the deity, death, burial, resurrection, and ascension of Christ. They say if one believes in Christ as the Son of God we should fellowship him. James says, the demons believe and tremble (Jam. 2:19). The evil spirits (demons) of Jesus's day affirmed who He was (Mark 5:7, Luke 4:33-34, 41; 8:41). Who will argue that we are to have fellowship with the demons? These false teachers teach that subjects like marriage divorce and remarriage, baptism, oneness of the church, the Lord's Supper are matters of doctrine and that we are not to make "doctrine" a test of fellowship. They make a distinction between *gospel* and *doctrine* that the Bible does not make. They make *gospel* to apply only to those teaching about Christ, i.e., His deity, birth, death, resurrection, etc. They teach we should preach only *gospel* to the lost and preach *doctrine* to the churches. Brother Goebel Music in his book *A Critical Study Of A Critical Subject—Fellowship*, on pages 21 and 22 gives quotations from six Bible scholars to show that the word doctrine (*didache*) used in 2 John 9 applies not to the teaching about Christ, but rather to the teaching of Christ (the entirety of the New Testament teaching). Paul was ready to preach the **gospel** to those at Rome (Rom. 1:14). Was Paul only going to teach these in Christ about the deity, death, resurrection, and ascension of our Lord? To any truth-seeking person even a casual reading of the book of Romans proves otherwise. Brother Music's book is recommended reading, as is brother Robert Taylor, Jr.'s book, *The Bible Doctrine of Christian Fellowship*. These who teach that doctrine should not divide people or be a test of fellowship would fellowship almost any professed believer in Christ, except those in the church who stand firm for God's Word and the teaching and practice of the Word.

Anyone who teaches that the Lord's Supper is an option to be taken or left should certainly be withdrawn from since they are false teachers who refuse to repent. Remember, Paul instructs those at Rome to mark and avoid them that cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine (Rom. 16:17). I guess the Holy Spirit forgot to

inform Paul that doctrine is not important! When one reads in the gospel account of the life of our Savior, he reads of Jesus's doctrine which astonished men (Mat. 7:28). He taught according to His doctrine (Mark 4:2), but said that doctrine was not His, but was the Father's that sent Him (John 7:16). The Jews accused the apostles of filling Jerusalem with their doctrine (Acts 5:28). The Jews are calling the teaching about the deity of Christ—His death and resurrection—doctrine, not gospel! Read the books of 1 Timothy, 2 Timothy, and Titus, and look at the importance of doctrine that Paul stresses to these two young preachers. They were to teach no other doctrine, hold sound doctrine, abide in the doctrine, and even warned of those who would not heed sound doctrine. Those who would teach that doctrine (including the subjects of both fellowship and the Lord's Supper) is not a test of fellowship, do not have any Bible teaching to uphold their position.

Let us not demean either Christian fellowship or the Lord's Supper by giving in to those who would ruin both. Paul appeals to the Corinthians to use wise reasoning to avoid fellowship with the table of devils (1 Cor. 10:15). If only all in the religious world, even many in the Lord's church, would use reason in their study and application of God precious Word!

ENDNOTES

¹*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc.) 1995, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

²*Ibid.*

³Kittel, Gerhard, and Friedrich, Gerhard, Editors, *The Theological Dictionary of the New Testament, Abridged in One Volume*, (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company) 1985, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

⁴Russell Benjamin Miller, "Communion," *The International Standard Bible Encyclopaedia*, ed. James Orr (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1983), 2:688-689.

⁵*The Jerome Biblical Commentary*, Vol. 2, The First Letter to the Corinthians, (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall) 1968, [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

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FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER

Howell Bigham



Howell Bigham was born August 10, 1960, in Anniston, Alabama. He is married to the former Jackie Elizabeth Calvert of Muscle Shoals, Alabama. Howell and Jackie have two children, Jonathan and Hannah Caroline. Howell graduated from the Bellview Preacher Training School, Pensacola, Florida, in 1985; the University of North Alabama in 1990 with a B.S. degree in accounting; and is presently working toward a Master's degree in Christian Counseling at Southern Christian University.

Howell has authored three sermon outline books entitled: *But I Speak Concerning Christ And The Church*, *Footsteps Of A Firm Faith*, and *Walking Down Bible Halls*. He has worked with

the following congregations: Annapolis Avenue, Sheffield, Alabama; County Line, Moulton, Alabama; Frankfort Road, Tuscumbia, Alabama; and is presently with the Hatton Church of Christ in Town Creek, Alabama. Howell's twin brother, Harold, is a gospel preacher.

INTRODUCTION

There are things in this temporal world that are inseparable. Consider the vast number of automobiles racing down the highways of our nation and the gasoline that propels them. A moving automobile and the fuel that propels it are inseparable! Furthermore, think about oxygen and life itself. Without oxygen we would face death squarely in the face.

On a higher plane, there are elements in the spiritual realm that are wedded together. Some of these are Christ and the church (Eph. 5:32), the Bible and its inspiration (2 Tim. 3:16), faith and baptism (Mark 16:16), repentance and baptism (Acts 2:38), and fellowship and prayer (Mat. 6:9), the theme for our perusal.

THE ATROCIOUS ERROR BEING CIRCULATED

The Bible repeatedly affirms the persistency of our old adversary, the devil! He has been persistent in the manufacturing of myriad false doctrines that have been met with the truth in written and oral debates. His cause is flourishing among some brethren today as the denominational doctrines of unity-in-diversity and praying through to salvation have merged together. Faithful brethren will draw the sword of the Spirit (Eph. 6:17) and fight tenaciously against such error! The

following examples are given that we may underscore the importance for such a study of fellowship and prayer.

Max Lucado, in his infamous radio broadcast dated December 1996, over the air waves of KJAK in Lubbock, Texas, ask sinners to pray this prayer with him:

Father, I give my heart to you. I give you my sins, I give you my tears, I give you my fears, I give you my whole life. I accept the gift of your Son on the cross for my sins. And I ask you, Father, to receive me as your child. Through Jesus I pray. Amen.

The announcer then stated to the listening audience:

And, friend, if prayed along with Max Lucado just now, here on UPWARDS, we want to welcome you into the family of God. We hope you will contact us and share your personal testimony. If you are already a believer, we thank you for praying for these new brothers and sisters in Christ...Max Lucado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer.

Max Lucado, back on the air, states the following:

Today is the first day you've ever prayed prayer like that. Could you do me a favor? Could you write me a letter? I don't have anything I am going to ask from you. I do have a letter I would like to send to you, I'd like to give you a word about the next step or two. I want to encourage you to find a church, I want to encourage you to be baptized, I want to encourage you to read your Bible. But I don't want you to do any of that so that you will be saved. I want you to do all of that because you are saved. You see, your Father has a great life planned for you, and I want to tell you about it. Give us a call, and drop me a note. And, thanks my friend, for making the greatest decision of your life. I'll be back on Monday. I hope you will be, too.¹

Another purveyor of false teaching concerning fellowship and prayer is Mike Cope. He stated:

But what are you going to do with all the wonderful Spirit-filled, Jesus-like, prayerful believers who don't go to church where we go, weren't baptized and whose doctrine doesn't line up exactly like ours. That was the crisis for me. And, it hit me, unity can't come by uniformity. We are never going to be united by trying to clone people. By saying: "Okay, you've got to have one person's personality; You've got to have one person's preferences; You've got to have one person's understanding of scripture." We will never get it that way. It gets back to the first lesson in this series, where I pointed out that if you want uniformity, the thing to do is not give everybody a Bible but go get everybody's Bible and hide it.²

A third example of compromising the truth on the biblical subject of fellowship and prayer involves Don Finto and Rubel Shelly. In the bulletin of the Seibles Road Church of Christ in Montgomery, Alabama, dated February 11, 1996, brother Jon Gary Williams, of LaVergne, Tennessee, wrote that he had received an invitation to attend a breakfast meeting at the Belmont church in Nashville, Tennessee. Area preachers were invited to come hear what God was doing in the lives of several “Nashville pastors.” Among the “pastors” were Jerry Sutton (Baptist), Don Finto, and Rubel Shelly. Please observe carefully the text of the invitation:

January 10, 1996

Dear Minister,

This Tuesday, **January 16 from 7:30 am-9:00 am**, Nashville area pastors will gather for breakfast at the Fellowship Hall of Belmont Church on Music Square to meet one another and hear what God is doing in our area. Several Nashville pastors including Jerry Sutton, Rubel Shelly, and Don Finto have been praying and working together. They want to tell us how God has blessed as they’ve come together.³

These are by no means the only examples of brethren compromising what the Bible teaches on the precious matter of fellowship and prayer. These three are given to emphasize that such a study is sorely needed!

ANALYZING THE TERMS

First, let us analyze the word *fellowship*. What does it mean? A definition of the term is “the state of association, comradeship, a company of equals, mutual relation among members of the same church; partnership, joint participation, agreement.”⁴ One can readily see what the word means from a study of the Bible. For example, Amos wrote, “Can two walk together, except they be **agreed?**” (Amos 3:3). In order to have fellowship with the Godhead and with faithful brethren, there must be agreement. Agreement upon what? John, the beloved apostle wrote that the standard upon which we base fellowship is the truth, the Word of God. He wrote:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 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 (1 John 1:5-7).

He further stressed the standard upon which fellowship exists and is maintained is the Word of God when he penned by inspiration:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Therefore, if the term *fellowship* is understood by man in light of what the Word of God teaches, sincere and honest men will not seek to redefine the term and broaden its boundaries. The Bible does not teach unity in diversity, big “F” and little “f” fellowship!

All are encouraged to obey the gospel to have fellowship with the Godhead and brethren in Christ, Then they must walk in step with God’s Word to continue to enjoy fellowship. When one departs from the teachings of the Bible, fellowship with God has been withdrawn. Faithful brethren, after giving the erring time to repent (Rev. 2:21), will enforce withdrawal of fellowship which tragically has become to be known as the “forgotten commandment” (2 The. 3:14-15; Rom. 16:17; 2 John 9-11; 1 Cor. 5:11).

Like fellowship, prayer is a subject that is so clearly taught within the Bible, and yet it has been perverted by many. It would do man well to know what prayer is. Prayer has been defined as:

A direct, personal approach to God. In prayer, men express their adoration of God, their thanksgiving to God for the many blessings which God has given and which He has promised to give. When men *study* the word of God, God is speaking to them through that word. When men *pray*, they are speaking to God, not only, as just noted, to express gratitude and adoration to God but to petition Him for blessings which simply will not come to man if he (man) does not ask for them⁵

This corresponds to the teaching of James 4:2 and Matthew 7:7-11. “Jesus conceived of prayer as a means of direct communication with God, as the establishment of a vital contact between Himself and that One in whom all men live and move and have their being.”⁶

One of the greatest chapters in the New Testament that informs us about prayer is 1 Timothy 2. In the opening verse, Paul lists some of the elements of prayer. He wrote, “I exhort therefore, that, first of all,

supplications, prayers, intercessions, *and* giving of thanks, be made for all men” (1 Tim. 2:1). What do these terms refer to? *Supplications* refers to a petition for a recognized need. *Prayers* are petitions to God. *Intercessions* are prayers in behalf of others. *Thanksgivings* are expressions of gratitude.⁷ Other elements of prayer are praise (Mat. 6:9) and confession (Jam. 5:16). In 1 Timothy 2:1 Paul also points out that Christians are to pray for all men. He states that men are to pray everywhere, thus denoting that the faithful male Christian is to be the leader in public prayer in the worship assembly, Bible classes, devotionals, and any place where both sexes are present (v. 8).

There are certain requirements to be met regarding prayer. These conditions are:

1. One must be in Christ, for all spiritual blessings are found in Him (Eph. 1:3).
2. Prayers must be addressed to God (Mat. 6:9).
3. The person praying must desire to pray and express his desire (Rom. 10:1).
4. The prayer must be in accordance with God’s will (1 John 5:14).
5. The prayer must be in the name of Jesus Christ (John 14:13-14).
6. The prayer must be in faith (Jam. 1:5-7).
7. The person who prays must do so with the spirit and the understanding (1 Cor. 14:15).
8. We must be persistent in our praying (Luke 18:1).
9. The prayers must be sincere, fervent, and earnest (1 The. 3:10; Jam. 5:16; Rom. 15:30).
10. The person who prays must be righteous (1 Pet. 3:12).
11. Prayers must not be from selfish motives (Jam. 4:3).
12. The person praying must forgive others as he petitions God to forgive him (Mat. 6:15).

The Bible teaches that God answers the prayers of His children (Psa. 118:5). He will answer our prayers by saying no (Mat. 26:39, 44), by saying yes (Jam. 5:17), by saying wait awhile (Jer. 42:4, 7), by giving us that which is totally different (2 Cor. 12:7-9), and by giving us more than we petitioned Him for (Eph. 3:20). But how does He answer the prayers of His children? He answers prayers providen-

tially. Brother Wendell Winkler makes these sage comments regarding the providential answering of our prayers by God. He states:

Belief in the providential answering of prayer is most comforting and strengthening. To believe otherwise leaves the soul shaken and the heart empty. Contrariwise belief in the providential working of God, in conjunction with our prayers, brings comfort to broken hearts, assurance to troubled minds and strength to burdened backs. Belief therein allays fears, quells doubts, and conquers anxieties.⁸

Brother Winkler also states, "Though we believe in providence without a microscopic doubt, we must be careful about seeking to prove matters subjectively."⁹

The subject of prayer is certainly one which God expects us to be knowledgeable of, for He desires and commands His children to pray to Him!

THE ARRANGEMENT OF THE TERMS IS EMINENTLY CORRECT

Even with a cursory glance of the Scriptures, one ought to be able to conclude that it is fellowship with God first and being able to pray to Him second! Isaiah, the statesman prophet vividly taught by inspiration this principle. He wrote, "Behold, the LORD'S hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; neither his ear heavy, that it cannot hear: But your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid *his* face from you, that he will not hear" (Isa. 59:1-2). Jesus zeroed in on the principle of fellowship with God first and being able to approach Him in prayer following when He said, "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask him?" (Mat. 7:11). In John 15:7 the Master Teacher stated, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you." Luke, the beloved physician, wrote concerning the first century church: "And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42). The inspired writer of the book of Hebrews taught the principle of fellowship with God first and then approaching His throne in heaven through the avenue of prayer. He wrote, "Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16). Notice that he said "Let **us** therefore **come boldly unto the**

throne of grace.” Who is identified as the *us* in this passage? Looking backward to verse 9 we find that he wrote, “There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.” In verse 10 he added, “For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God *did* from his.” Then in verse 11 he said, “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.” Then in verses 14-15, he points out that we have a great high priest in Jesus. Because of that we are to hold fast our profession and to come boldly unto the throne of grace through prayer. The *us*, therefore, of verse 16 is New Testament Christians! We are to be in fellowship with God and then we can pray to Him! Peter, in clear and clarion tones, wrote concerning this doctrine: “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). Thus, brethren, the theme of this study has been named correctly—it is fellowship first, and prayer following!

THE APPLICATION OF FELLOWSHIP AND PRAYER IN THE LIVES OF BIBLICAL CHARACTERS

The student of the Bible will meet intriguing characters as he “walks down the corridors of the Bible.” The great characters of the Bible were those who understood unequivocally that walking with God permitted them to be able to talk to Him through the avenue of prayer. Consider Abraham, the father of the faithful (Rom. 4:16); he is known as “the Friend of God” (2 Chr. 20:7; Isa. 41:8; Jam. 2:23). Thus, we have one who is in fellowship with God. As you track his steps through the pages of inspiration, you will notice that he fervently worshipped God. It has been said that one could trail Abraham by the smoke that ascended from the altars that he erected to God! Abraham strove to be pleasing to his God in heaven. Thus, it necessarily follows that he was loyal in praying to God. We study about the wicked city of Sodom and Abraham interceding in behalf of the righteous in that city (Gen. 18:22-33). Some of the most beautiful words relative to fellowship with God and prayer are found at the close of Genesis 18. The Bible reads, “And the LORD went his way, as soon as he had left communing with Abraham: and Abraham returned unto his place” (v. 33). We observe that he prayed for Abimelech in Genesis 20:17. Abraham was truly a man in whose life we can see the biblical principle of fellowship and prayer!

Moses, certainly was another person who walked with God and was therefore able to communicate through the avenue of prayer to God. Meek Moses (Num. 12:3) was faithful in God's house (Num. 12:7; Heb. 3:2). As a faithful servant he was the lawgiver of the Mosaic economy, deliverer of God's people from Egyptian bondage (Exo. 3:10), mediator (Gal. 3:19), prophet (Deu. 34:10), poet (Deu. 32), and inspired penman of the Pentateuch and Psalms 90, among other things. Moses, dedicated servant of God, was therefore, on praying terms with the Father. Consider two examples in the life of Moses. First, we find him, as the deliverer of the Israelites, before the hardened Pharaoh requesting the release of the people of God (Exo. 8:1). Pharaoh, upon rejection after rejection, was met with ten plagues from God. In regard to four of the ten plagues, Pharaoh asked Moses to pray to God that they would be taken away. Moses entreated the Lord in regard to these matters (Exo. 8:12, 30; 9:33; 10:18). Another example of faithful Moses praying is found in Psalms 90. He is the human penman of this poetic prayer. In this prayer, Moses discusses the eternal nature of God and the frailty of man. Moses, one of the great servants of God believed in prayer!

Another servant of God in whose life we can see the principle of fellowship first and prayer second is Samuel. When we remember that the mother of Samuel was Hannah, it is no wonder that he was a man of faithfulness to God and one that believed in the efficacy of prayer! Samuel, the last judge of the nation of Israel, was a loyal servant of God. When the Israelites wanted a king so they could be like the nations around them, Samuel carried the matter before the Lord. 1 Samuel 8:6 reads, "But the thing displeased Samuel, when they said, Give us a king to judge us. And Samuel prayed unto the LORD." We observe him praying for the Israelites in 1 Samuel 7:9. Samuel believed adamantly in prayer for he later said to the Israelites: "Moreover as for me, God forbid that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you" (1 Sam. 12:23).

Daniel is a classic example of a life that exemplified the truth of fellowship and prayer. Regardless of the law forbidding petitioning anyone other than king Darius for 30 days, Daniel set his face toward Jerusalem and prayed three times a day as he had done previously. The stately Scriptures read:

Now when Daniel knew that the writing was signed, he went into his house; and his windows being open in his chamber toward Jerusalem, he kneeled upon his knees three times a day, and prayed, and gave thanks before his God, as he did aforetime (Dan. 6:10).

Daniel knew that disobeying the law of man would place him in the den of lions. However, he served the God of heaven who made the lions! The next morning Daniel spoke from the den these words, "My God hath sent his angel, and hath shut the lions' mouths, that they have not hurt me: forasmuch as before him innocency was found in me; and also before thee, O king, have I done no hurt" (Dan. 6:22). Daniel, indeed was a man walking with God and one who prayed habitually to his heavenly Father!

In the New Testament we can see the application of the principle of fellowship with God first and praying to Him second in the life of the apostle Paul. Formerly called Saul of Tarsus in Cilicia, a Pharisee, a great persecutor of the church, he was lost in his sins. However, after obeying the gospel in the city of Damascus, he zealously served God (Acts 22:10-16). When we contemplate Paul, we learn that "no man in the whole New Testament, not excepting our Savior, ever said as much about prayer as did the apostle Paul, nor do we see anyone personally practicing this teaching more consistently than did Paul."¹⁰

We read that Paul desired that "men pray every where" (1 Tim. 2:8). Paul taught that we are to "pray without ceasing" (1 The. 5:17). He said regarding his physical brethren, the Jews, that his "heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved." (Rom. 10:1). Writing to the brethren in Colosse, he stated, "We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you" (Col. 1:3). The defender of the faith wrote in Ephesians 6:10-18 regarding the assurance of victory that we as faithful Christians have in our fight against the devil. Among his listing of the Christian armor, he included the item of prayer. Paul, in fellowship with God, prayed and taught others the need to pray!

Another example of one whose life illustrated the matter of fellowship and prayer is the apostle Peter. One of the original twelve apostles, Peter was a man of prayer. We find Peter and John going together into the temple at the hour of prayer in Acts 3:1. In Acts 10:9 we discover Peter upon the housetop praying. He wrote regarding the importance of husband and wife living harmoniously together so that

their prayers would not be short-circuited (1 Pet. 3:7). Peter also encouraged Christians to remember that God hears our prayers. He penned: “For the eyes of the Lord *are* over the righteous, and his ears *are open* unto their prayers: but the face of the Lord *is* against them that do evil” (1 Pet. 3:12). Peter, apostle of Christ, faithful servant of God, believed in and practiced the biblical doctrine of fellowship and prayer!

The perfect illustration of fellowship and prayer is that of our Lord Jesus Christ. The second member of the Godhead left the glory of heaven and came to this earth for the purpose of redeeming man from his sins (Luke 19:10). During the short span of time that He walked on the dusty roads of this earth and talked to man, He never **said** the wrong thing, **did** the wrong thing, or even **thought** the wrong thing. The Hebrews’ writer poignantly wrote, “For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as *we are, yet without sin*” (Heb. 4:15). Thus, Jesus always was victorious over the devil’s darts of temptation that would seek to destroy the fellowship that exists between Him and God. In fellowship with His Heavenly Father, Christ often prayed. Our Lord talked about prayer more than 60 times in His ministry upon the earth, and there are more than 20 instances in the Bible that is recorded of our Lord taking the time to pray. Jesus provides the perfect example of one in fellowship with God the Father who took time to pray! Perhaps the best example that we have of Jesus in regard to the issue of fellowship and prayer is found in John chapter 17. Jesus lifting up His eyes to heaven prayed for Himself (vv. 1-5), for His apostles (vv. 6-19), for all who shall believe on Him through the apostle’s word (vv. 20-23), and that His disciples may be with Him in eternity (vv. 24-26). He also prayed:

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (vv. 20-21).

Christ taught that the basis of fellowship is the Word. When we obey the truth, then we can pray: “Our Father which art in heaven” (Mat. 6:9)!

ATTITUDE THAT WE MUST HAVE

In view of what the Bible teaches concerning fellowship and prayer, what must our attitude be regarding this issue? Should we be like some brethren and fellowship denominations and have ecumenical prayer gatherings? If so, we have forfeited fellowship with God and the precious privilege of prayer to Him! The attitude concerning fellowship and prayer that we must imbibe is so beautifully expressed in the following passages:

Give ear to my words, O LORD, consider my meditation. Hearken unto the voice of my cry, my King, and my God: for unto thee will I pray. My voice shalt thou hear in the morning, O LORD; in the morning will I direct *my prayer* unto thee, and will look up (Psa. 5:1-3).

Yet the LORD will command his lovingkindness in the daytime, and in the night his song *shall be* with me, *and* my prayer unto the God of my life (Psa. 42:8).

Because he hath inclined his ear unto me, therefore will I call upon *him* as long as I live (Psa. 116:2).

Evening, and morning, and at noon, will I pray, and cry aloud: and he shall hear my voice (Psa. 55:17).

Brethren, our attitude has to be that we want more than anything else to walk humbly with God and pray fervently and frequently to Him while here on this earth that one day we can walk the street of gold and commune with Him eternally!

ENDNOTES

¹Gary Colley, "Baptism For Remission Of Sins Denied By Max Lucado," *The Southwesterner* (Southwest Church of Christ bulletin, Austin, TX, August 3, 1997), pp. 1-2.

²Edwin Jones, "Something Bad Really Is Happening!" *The Messenger* (Karns Church of Christ bulletin, Knoxville, TN, July 20, 1997), pp. 1-2.

³Jon Gary Williams, "Rubel Shelly Ties Himself To Baptists And Don Finto!" (Seibles Road Church of Christ bulletin, February 11, 1996), p. 1.

⁴Garland Elkins, "Changing Attitudes Toward Fellowship." *Changes In The Church Of Christ*, ed. Bobby Liddell (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1994), p. 140.

⁵Thomas B. Warren, "Almsgiving, Prayer, Fasting, Riches, and Necessities," *The Book Of Matthew*, ed. Elkins and Warren (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1988), p. 225.

⁶Charles Chumbley, "Jesus' Practice Of Praying," *AIM* (Granny White Church Of Christ bulletin, Nashville, TN, February 8, 1981), p. 1.

⁷Robert R. Taylor, Jr., *Studies In First and Second Timothy* (Shreveport, LA: Lambert Book House, Inc.), p. 33.

⁸Wendell Winkler, "Should Christians Expect Miracles When They Pray For Physical Illness?" *The Providence Of God*, ed. Warren and Elkins (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1989), pp. 376-377.

⁹Ibid., p. 375.

¹⁰G. C. Brewer, *Contending For The Faith* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate, 1971), p. 32.

FELLOWSHIP AND GIVING

Gary L. Grizzell



Gary L. Grizzell is a native Tennessean. He is married to Lois (Sewell) and they have one son, Tyler. Gary is a graduate of East Tennessee School of Preaching and Tennessee Bible College (B.A., *Magna Cum Laude*). He has done local preaching in Tennessee, Florida, Alabama, and Mississippi. Gary is the author of the book *Unscriptural Binding*, a recent written debate on three “anti” doctrines, 17 tracts, and also writes for several brotherhood publications. He is the Editor/Publisher of *Pillars Publications*, through which he distributes doctrinally sound gospel tracts. Gary is presently working with the Alexandria Church of Christ in Alexandria, Tennessee.

ONE OF THE GREAT THEMES OF THE BIBLE

Fellowship is one of the great themes of the Bible. It begins in Genesis chapter 3 where man’s fellowship with God is seen as Adam and Eve “heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day” (Gen. 3:8). Biblical history’s account of man’s fellowship with God during the great early dispensations (the Patriarchal and Mosaic Dispensations) may be studied in detail as recorded in the 39 inspired books of the Old Testament. Today, in the Christian Age fellowship with God through His Son Jesus Christ is a major theme in the New Testament, which consists of 27 inspired books.

FELLOWSHIP AND THE NEW TESTAMENT OF JESUS CHRIST

The New Testament is the law of God in effect today and therefore binding on all men now living. Men are to fulfill the “law of Christ” (Gal. 6:2). Therefore, we must look to it to determine the only acceptable answers concerning the magnificent subject of fellowship. We must look to the New Testament to determine the answer to relevant questions such as:

1. How does one get into fellowship with God?
2. How does one get into fellowship with God’s people, the church?

3. How does one stay in fellowship with God and with God's people?
4. Does one's giving (that is, one's financial contribution on the first day of the week, 1 Cor. 16:1-2) relate to the subject of fellowship with God? If so, in what way?
5. Does proper stewardship by the eldership relate to their fellowship with God? If so, in what way?

Let's study each of the above questions in light of God's teaching in the New Testament:

How Does One Get Into Fellowship With God?

One gets into fellowship with God by obeying the simple to understand gospel of Christ. By hearing, believing, and obeying the gospel plan of salvation the sinner comes into a saving relationship with God. The steps of the gospel plan of salvation are as follows:

1. Hear—Romans 10:17.
2. Believe in Jesus Christ as God's only begotten Son—John 8:24.
3. Repent—Acts 2:38.
4. Confess Christ as the only begotten Son of God—Romans 10:9-10.
5. Be buried with Christ in water baptism for the remission of all of one's past sins—Acts 2:38; Romans 6:3-4.

How Does One Get Into Fellowship With God's People, The Church?

When one comes into fellowship with God (by obeying the five steps of the plan of salvation just described), then one simultaneously (automatically) comes into fellowship with God's people. The inspired apostle John wrote to Christians affirming his desire that they have fellowship "with us" (he and the other apostles) (1 John 1:3). He went on to point out that fellowship among faithful, fellow Christians was possible because of a common denominator, saying, "Truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). According to 1 John 1:5-7, another way of presenting this concept is: (1) Verse 5—God is light (truth), (2) Verse 6—We have fellowship with God when we walk in the light (the truth of God's Word), and (3) Verse 7—Christians have fellowship one with another when they walk in the light (where God is). John is clear that if a

child of God walks in darkness (in falsehood, error, apostasy) that he lies if he says he has fellowship with God and with God's people. All of this means that one who has fellowship with God also has fellowship with all faithful Christians on the planet (even those unknown by face or reputation, 3 John 5).

How Does One Stay In Fellowship With God And With God's People?

One stays in fellowship with God and with God's people by faithful Christian living. Again, this is accomplished by continuing to walk in the light of God's Word (1 John 1:7). "The verb 'walk' here ... is...literally, 'If we keep on walking in the light...'"¹

Does One's Giving (That Is, Financial Contribution On The First Day Of The Week, 1 Cor. 16:1-2) Relate To The Subject Of Fellowship With God? If So, In What Way?

Yes! In what way does one's giving relate to the subject of fellowship with God? An obedient faith (faithful Christian living) is necessary to one's continued fellowship with God. The faithful Christian life includes many areas of individual responsibilities. One of those responsibilities is giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2). Just as one is required as a Christian to pray, sing, hear preaching, and partake of the Lord's supper on the first day of the week, just so he (she) is required to give of his means as God has prospered him. Just as one would not think of skipping the Lord's Supper during worship, he should not want to omit his giving to the Lord and His cause. Disobedience in this area or any other essential area of Christian duty (walking disorderly, 2 The. 3:6) leads to a break in fellowship with God. As a consequence of walking disorderly, the apostate then becomes subject to withdrawal of fellowship procedures by the Lord's church. What a shame it would be for a Christian to lose his joint participation in the blessings of salvation (fellowship) with his fellow Christians just because he refused out of pride, greed, or some other motive to give properly. The conscientious child of God will give with the **right attitude** and the **right amount**. One who has the right disposition in his giving will have little trouble in determining the right dollar amount. Each Christian will be conscious of how God has prospered him the week prior to his giving.

Does Proper Stewardship By The Eldership (Leadership) Relate To Their Fellowship With God? If So, In What Way?

Yes! In what way? The eldership must know and appreciate the true nature and mission of the Lord's church coupled with a possession of good stewardship abilities. Church leaders must be conscious of God's will about good stewardship and that disobedience in this area will most certainly lead to a break in their **own** fellowship with God! God has specified three (and only three) areas wherein His money is to be distributed. These are as follows: (1) **Evangelism**—Mark 16:15; Matthew 28:19-20; (2) **Edification** (teaching program)—Ephesians 4:12; and (3) **Benevolence**—Acts 2:44-45; 4:35; 6:1-4. Elders have authority in making judgments in expedient matters as pertains to these three areas of church work (Heb. 13:7, 17—elders have “the rule over you”).

THE FRUIT OF SOULS

The benefits of bearing fruit through the support of faithful mission works should not be underestimated. Consider the example of the Philippian church who enjoyed an association with the dedicated apostle Paul in the work of preaching. Notice the varied blessings of supporting a faithful preacher in the mission field as seen in Paul's statements to the Philippians.

Spiritual strength and encouragement can be drawn from such a relationship.

I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, Always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, For your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now; Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform *it* until the day of Jesus Christ: Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ (Phi. 1:3-8).

“Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me” (Phi. 2:17-18).

The faithful missionary may recommend another faithful preacher(s) who will unselfishly help the sending church.

But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state. For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's. But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel (Phi. 2:19-22).

The receiving preacher who is laboring under difficult circumstances has his material needs supplied. “Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants” (Phi. 2:25; see also Phi. 4:18).

The supporting congregation can contribute to God's faithful preacher(s) rejoicing greatly in the Lord, though he may be undergoing imprisonment as a result of preaching the pure gospel. “But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity” (Phi. 4:10).

God may be depending on a particular church to give to the faithful missionary when no other congregation has it in their plans.

Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity (Phi. 4:14-16).

What further hardship would the sacrificial and great apostle Paul have been forced to suffer had not the Philippian eldership chosen to be used of God? (Phi. 1:1). When the faithful missionary visits and speaks of his mission plans among the spiritually lost of the uttermost parts of the world, do you ask yourself the question: “What if no other church participates in the giving and receiving process?” Do you (we) ask what will happen to the lost who will not hear the good news of salvation? (Rom. 10:13-15)—only damnation awaits (Mark 16:16). If they could be saved without going it would be better not to go, but such is not the case (Mat. 7:13-14).

The sending church can know there are preachers with all the right motives seeking support to go to the mission field. “Not because I desire a gift: but I desire fruit that may abound to your

account” (Phi. 4:17). The Philippian elders had sincere, qualified evangelists and messengers before them, such as Paul, Timothy, and Epaphroditus. Dear elders, please do not allow yourselves to fall into the trap of hoarding the Lord’s money due to the misconception that all who preach are money-hungry. While there are those in every endeavor in life who are hypocrites, there are still the seven thousand who have not bowed the knee to Baal (1 Kin. 19:18). There are those like Timothy “who will naturally care for your state” (Phi. 2:20). Look for the Timothies and when you find them, support them.

The congregation who sends a missionary into the field bears the fruit of souls. Paul said, “I desire fruit that may abound to your account” (Phi. 4:17). The church at Philippi could know that the fruit that Paul bore was also the fruit that they bore. Truly, as someone once said, if one cannot go in person, he can go in purse. Not all will be in a position to travel to Africa, India, or Russia, but they can still be a significant part of the work by helping others to go. Personal obedience is necessary to salvation (Phi. 2:12; John 15:2). While the support of mission work with prayers, letters of encouragement, and finances are not the only avenues through which to exercise personal obedience, these are certainly needed!

The contributions of the church to the faithful missionary, whether in necessary material items or in the form of needed funds, is what is pleasing to God. “But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things *which were sent* from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God” (Phi. 4:18). Out of love for God the elders and members desire to do the Father’s will. This means that we who are members of the bride of Christ will always be doing our part to see that the gospel is preached to every creature in our generation (Mat. 7:21; John 14:15).

Within one generation the early church preached the gospel to every person, according to Colossians 1:6, 23; and Romans 10:18. Whenever the gospel is preached to every creature under heaven, God, who gave His Son is glorified; Jesus, who gave His life on the cross is glorified; and men are given the opportunity to hear, believe, and obey the gospel. Jesus said, “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all *men* unto me” (John 12:32).

ELDERSHIPS AND EXTREMES TO AVOID

As in any endeavor in life in seeking to reach a noble goal, there are extremes to avoid. It appears there are two major extremes elderships/church leaders (the men of the congregation where a plurality of men are unqualified to be appointed as elders) should avoid in spending the Lord's money: (1) Hoarding (keeping or storing up as a hidden supply) the Lord's money, and (2) Misplacement of the Lord's funds.

Hoarding The Lord's Money

Excuses offered may vary, but whenever the Lord's money is hoarded, behind it all is greediness, littleness, pride, and certainly a lack of faith (1 Tim 6:10, "For the love of money is the root of all evil"). The devil's influence in the church is seen when faithful brethren are forced to "fight" tight-fisted, little-thinking brethren in the leadership so that the Lord's money is truly used to preach the gospel (2 Cor. 2:11). After hard-working brethren lay by in store on the first day of the week, giving into the Lord's treasury as God has prospered them, it is inappropriate to merely accumulate it rather than use it. **Elders, it's not your money! It is the Lord's money** and He has entrusted you to (1) distribute it, and to (2) distribute it into the three areas of work revealed in the New Covenant. **This is not an optional matter.**

Perhaps the shoe should be put on the right foot when deciding who **really** has a problem with the inordinate love of money. One congregation was known to have over \$100,000 of the Lord's money squirreled away while the faithful missionaries were sent away begging. What was the reason for refusal to properly distribute the Lord's funds for the preaching of the gospel? It was not that the building debt was unpaid (the building had been bought and paid for long ago); the reason was that the leadership (two men, not elders) persuaded the other men to believe that most sound-in-doctrine preachers are serving mammon! Their "logic" could stand some examination. Even if it were the case that most sound-in-doctrine preachers in the Lord's church are serving self rather than the Lord (which a host of brethren would deny), is it logical to then withhold the Lord's funds from the sound preachers who **are** rightly motivated? To make matters worse, later information came out that those two faithless individuals who had deceived the men were only interested in passing the control of

the money down to the next generation in the church, i.e., family relations. Brethren, these things ought not so to be! When the Lord's church quits preaching the gospel, it has lost its very reason for existing! "The church that does not evangelize will fossilize."² It will fossilize into either the extreme of bickering, fussing, and gossiping or into the extreme of turning the army of Christ into a junior-high mentality social club.

Misplacement Of The Lord's Money By Giving To Unauthorized, Unworthy Works

Good stewardship must make a distinction between mission efforts which are sound and worthy works. Sometimes, one has more potential to be productive than another. In this scenario one's best judgment is what is required (Mat. 28:19-20; Gal. 5:1; Acts 16:7-10).

There are certain works that simply should not be supported by faithful brethren. Wise elders and individual Christians will not give to proponents of **Antiism**. These are those individuals, congregations, and editors of periodicals who bind where God's Word has not bound. Recently I was given a bulletin of one of these groups.³ A list of their missionaries supported out of the treasury was given. Though the relatively small group was giving over \$10,000 per month to 10 preachers, only the names of the preachers were given as recipients. The reason the elderships or names of the churches were not named, no doubt, was because the monthly support was/is always sent **directly to the preachers**. After all, they foolishly argue it is a sin to send the Lord's money from congregation A (the contributing church) to congregation B (the receiving church where the missionary labors), so the elders can distribute those funds to the missionary. Why would they argue such? They believe that this would mean that congregation B (the receiving church) would be put in a position of authority over the contributing church. Such foolishness! So goes the doctrine of anti-church cooperation in preaching the gospel. They **unscripturally** argue, "When it is for benevolence, send to the church; when it for evangelism, send to the preacher." Why can these erring brethren not see that when their same "reasoning" is applied to their present practice of sending directly to the preachers, they would then have 10 preachers put in a position of authority over them (the contributing church)? The truth of the matter is that churches may cooperate both in benevolent matters and in evangelistic matters (Acts 11:27-30; Acts

15:22-35). Each leadership may choose to participate or withdraw participation at any time and the principle of church autonomy is kept intact (Gal. 5:1). Antiism is not to be supported! Individuals associated with such a group cannot argue that since they worship according to the New Testament pattern, therefore it is scriptural to worship with them. James 2:10 teaches that if we offend in one point (of the things necessary for salvation), we violate the entire law of Christ. You cannot by your presence and your financial contribution uphold and bid Godspeed to the leaders of **antiism** (false teachers who bind where God has not bound) without being a partaker of their evil deeds! (2 John 9-11).

Wise elderships will not throw the Lord's money away on man-made **missionary societies**. To research the subject of the missionary society as it relates to the present day arrangement of the *Herald of Truth* is revealing, to say the least. Without question, the present day arrangement of said organization is unscriptural. The *Herald of Truth* is no longer a program of a church, but is a separate organization from the church seeking to do the work of the church, e.g., sending out missionaries, receiving the funds from the contributing churches and individuals (as opposed to the church receiving those funds). One brother's candid conversation with an elder of the wayward Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, (preacher, Mike Cope) resulted in the following enlightening evaluation of the arrangement:

He confirmed my suspicions, saying that that church no longer has any legal connection with the program, and that the program is now a separate non-profit organization....If the Herald of Truth Media Ministries is doing nothing except the work of the church, then why not let this work be done through the church?⁴

The same brother penned his editorial in the January 1997, issue of *VIGIL* with the title, "An Open Letter to the Executive Director of Herald of Truth." In that article he included a letter he had written, dated January 18, 1993, to the then director of *Herald of Truth*, brother Randy Becton. In the conclusion of his letter to Becton, brother Bobby Duncan wrote:

If the Herald of Truth Ministries is doing nothing except the work of the church, then why not let this work be done through the church? If it is engaged in some private enterprise that is not a part of the work of the church, then let it be a separate organization from the church, but let it quit asking churches for support.⁵

A humanly originated missionary society is unneeded and unscriptural in that it, among other things, serves as a substitute for the church. The divine institution, the church, is the pillar and ground of the truth and needs no substitute! (Mat. 16:18; 1 Tim. 3:15). Even if the government should seek to force the church to do that which would result in the formation of an unscriptural arrangement, we must obey God rather than man (Acts 4:19-20; 5:29).

Knowledgeable men in the leadership of the precious body of Christ will not support, endorse, or encourage those who wish to turn the church into nothing more than an entertainment center. While association with fellow Christians is to be encouraged, the church should respect the wisdom of God to determine **the drawing power of the gospel**. God wishes to keep the drawing power of the gospel the cross of Christ (2 Cor. 11:1-3; 1 Cor. 1:17-18). The appeal of the social gospel which many are advocating is entertainment under the guise of religion. What do we want to come to the mind of the community when they think of the church: the opportunity for sports' activities, or an invitation to be forgiven of sins by the blood of Christ? Which will it be for the future church? The cross of Christ or recreation as the drawing power? We should all take our stand with the apostle Paul who said, "But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world" (Gal. 6:14).

A friend of mine once made a good analogy from Exodus 32. When Moses came down from the mount, having received the tablets of stone containing the 10 commandments, he found the people worshipping the golden calf. The people had become restless since Moses seemed to have been gone too long, so they clamored for Aaron to "make us gods" (v. 1). Aaron collected the people's golden earrings, cast them into the fire and made a golden calf. When Moses came down from the mount and saw what Aaron had done he called upon Aaron to give account for his action. He first pointed out that "they" (v. 23) wanted him to make the calf. Then he replied, "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break *it* off. So they gave *it* me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf" (v. 24). Did Aaron expect Moses to accept that excuse? More important, did Aaron expect God to accept that excuse? But what of modern day Aarons who expect faithful brethren (and more important,

God) to believe that they built a building for edification, benevolence, and evangelism and lo and behold, “There came out this gym.” Are we **really** expected to believe that the playing of basketball is not a primary purpose of these buildings and that it is at most an incidental use of these buildings built by the Lord’s treasury? Aaron made his golden calf out of design and gyms do not just appear anymore than Aaron’s calf just appeared. The gymnasium brethren today are like the people in Moses’ day—i.e., they have lost sight of their lawgiver and want change; and they want it now!

To those who have lost their faith in the power of the gospel to save the lost and insist that the church may build gymnasiums out of the treasury in order to appeal to the young people and the lost, consider the following questions: May the church build an 18-hole golf course from the Lord’s treasury as long as members of the church agree to stop and have prayer at each tee-off? After all, could not the church use this gimmick to invite sinners to play golf and perhaps then set up a Bible study? I’m sure there would be many takers for free golf. If the church rented the local High School gym for worship on Sundays for \$100 per Sunday, could the elders (with foresight out of the church treasury) pay the High School Superintendent an extra \$25 per Sunday so the kids of the church could enjoy an hour of basketball after worship? One misguided member of a large, liberal church of Christ in Texas wrote:

I am quite proud of the fact that at the congregation where my family attends we had the foresight to build an auditorium that is used not only on Sundays for worship assembly but also during the rest of the week for many other events for families including even basketball games.⁶

Why is this issue important? Because whenever the wisdom of God in saving the lost is set aside to accommodate human wisdom, there are always sad and destructive consequences (1 Cor. 1:17-25). How many preachers (and their families) are presently willing to preach in Russia but cannot get the support to go while liberals and digressives among us continue to selfishly and unscripturally waste the Lord’s money on their own desires? The me-generation is seen in the Lord’s church in two extremes: (1) Some leaderships hoard the Lord’s money, as has already been noted; and (2) Some spend the Lord’s money freely, but primarily upon themselves in inappropriate efforts. Either extreme misappropriates the Lord’s money and there-

fore the Lord's divine purpose for the church in a lost and dying world (Mark 16:15). The community looks to these churches for light in a dark world of sin, but the candle of truth has been snuffed out and sacrificed upon the altar of Babel (cf., Gen. 11:4). The "doctrine of Christ" (2 John 9) has been traded for the sugar coated, non-demanding theories of Grace Only, Faith Only, Unity in Diversity, and the "Come and be entertained" gospel. These Guaranteed-Not-To-Prick-Your-Heart preachers are offended with the type of preaching Peter did on Pentecost (cf., Acts 2:37-38). All faithful brethren are full of Christian joy, but they understand it is the fruit of **knowing** one has **first** pleased God in obedience (cf., Acts 8:39; 16:34).

Some brethren argue that the church may support about anything and everything out of the Lord's treasury if it is in the name of expediency in evangelism. One brother sought to justify the church financed gym by advocating that 1 Corinthians 9:22 authorizes such. However, consider the following excellent comment about Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 9:22, "I am made all things to all *men*, that I might by all means save some."

He accommodated himself to the prejudices and preferences of men so far as he could without sacrificing truth and righteousness, in order to win them to Christ. In other words, he sacrificed personal right and personal liberty of action rather than to insist upon them when they stood in the way of winning any man, or set of men, to the Lord.⁷

Paul's words in 1 Corinthians 9:22 must not be twisted to authorize the building of church financed gymnasiums for recreation under the guise of expediency.

A great article which shows how an authorized expediency may be abused appeared in the January 1984 issue of *Contending For The Faith* written by Larry Fluitt: "We're Going To Build A Baptistry!" In his allegory some over-zealous, misguided brethren, having proven authority for the expediency of a baptistry, decide they can now do anything they want with it. So they make it 60 feet long, string off lanes and the young people can now enjoy swimming in it. Then these brethren complain because some other brethren criticize them for building a swimming pool with the Lord's money. But they insist that it is only a baptistry! The bottom line is that unless there is a direct statement, approved account of action (example), or implication for a religious doctrine or practice, there is no New Testament authority for it (Col. 3:17; Mat. 28:18).

The three great Bible S's—service, sacrifice, and suffering—have been effectively deleted from the vocabulary of most Christians today...Churches with the most activities for the young people are attracting them like flies—and usually away from smaller churches who emphasize service above fun. Have a party and huge numbers appear; have a spiritual work session and those numbers disappear.⁸

How many sports' complexes did the first century church have in order to grow as they did? In fact, between the 1940s, and early 1960s how many gyms as so-called **tools** for evangelism did the Lord's church in America build in order to become the fastest growing religious group in America? Brethren, church growth in the first century and rapid church growth during the second period mentioned above, did not happen because of the church dabbling (or plunging headlong as the case may be today) in unscriptural gimmicks. The church grew when members of the Lord's church were studying their Bibles on a daily basis, living godly lives, believing the gospel was God's power to save, and telling their fellowman about God's plan to save man from sin. What do you think must be done today for the church to grow? (Luke 19:10; Col. 1:6; 2 Tim. 2:15; Rom. 1:16; Mat. 28:18-20).

There was nothing intrinsically evil concerning moving an object across country in David's new cart, but when David decided to move the ark of God in that new cart, he sinned. David really liked that new cart of his. And today those of the new hermeneutic love their new carts too. God had specified **how** the ark was to be moved and David ignored God's instructions (2 Sam. 6:3-10; 1 Chr. 13:7, 9, 11; Num. 4; 1 Sam. 6:7). There is nothing intrinsically evil with playing basketball, but that does not somehow constitute authority for brethren to dip into the Lord's treasury to construct a gymnasium to entertain the members! The Lord has specified the work of the church and providing entertainment is not included. Providing entertainment is the work of the home. The gymnasium brethren are blurring the roles God has given for the home and the church. If it is the church's business to provide sports' activities for the young people, by the same line of thought the elders should also spank them when they are disobedient to their parents. When the church starts assuming the role of the home, where does it end?

Just because the truth is narrow (and most will reject it) is no excuse for brethren to devise unscriptural methods in the form of

gadgets and gimmicks to attract the lost to Christ (Mat. 7:13-14). If the pure, unadulterated gospel preached in love is not attractive to the lost, then nothing will save them. The preaching of the cross will continue to be foolishness to those who are determined to perish, but to those who choose to be saved it will be seen for what it is: “the power of God” (1 Cor. 1:18). May we never be ashamed of the simple gospel of Christ (Rom. 1:16-17). May we hold to the simplicity that is in Christ so when men come, they will be coming to Christ the Lord and Savior and not to a false view of Christ (2 Cor. 11:3).

Last, elderships and individual Christians who know and respect God’s Word will not drain the Lord’s treasury to support **the misguided programs of those who ignore the apostasy** among today’s churches of Christ. Those of this stripe sabotage their own efforts. These are like the Jews of old who had a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge (Rom. 10:2). They zealously advocate to sinners that they hear, believe, repent, confess the name of Christ, be baptized for the remission of sins, and then **join the church of Christ of your choice**. Thus, they are guilty of incredible folly. The only ones who are guilty of greater folly are mindless supporters who viciously oppose those who point out the obvious imbalance in such! Just how hard is it to understand that not all who erect a sign in front of a meeting house reading “The Church Of Christ” are actually committed to a respect for Bible authority? Some who advocate to join the church (of Christ) of your choice today would condemn Billy Graham for telling multitudes to join the church of your choice. Yet, today, in many congregations which profess to be the Lord’s church the doctrines of the denominational theologians reign! To stand against the hard-headed liberals in many churches is to hasten one’s exit. Now, who would deny this documented fact? To deny it is to show further one’s ignorance of the situation. If you don’t believe it, friend, you are not subscribing to sound gospel papers like *Contending For The Faith* and *Firm Foundation*. Are you accentuating the positives in order to eliminate the negatives so much that you do not know where the front line is in the battle against Satan and his henchmen?

WHAT MEMBERS MUST BE TAUGHT

Jesus, the head of His church, has designed the pulpit and the classroom to teach the whole counsel of God (2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:20, 27; Eph. 4:11, 15). (1) Members of the church need lessons concern-

ing fellowship and giving. The man in the pew needs to be taught that fellowship with God is maintained by obedience to the faith, which includes obedience in giving as in all other essential areas of Christian living.

(2) The saints must know and understand the true nature and mission of the church. The church is Christ's spiritual institution, house, body, flock, and army (1 Tim. 3:15; Col. 1:18; John 10:11; Eph. 6:13). The purpose of the church is primarily to preach the gospel to a lost, dying, and hell-bent world (Mark 16:15-16). The church is not a poor man's country club where all activities are geared to entertain and make men feel good about themselves. The mission of the army of Christ is serious business and requires men and women who are hard-working, dedicated students of the Book of all books, the Bible (2 Tim. 2:15). The church is the pillar and ground of the truth and the king is depending on His kingdom to unashamedly stand strong against sin, immorality, and error in a world of darkness.

That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life (Phi. 2:15-16; cf., 1 Tim. 3:15).

(3) Christians who serve God in the local congregations to the best of their abilities, though perhaps not serving in the roles of elders, deacons, preachers, teachers, or song leaders, have the right to know that the direction of the congregation of which they are members is heaven-bound. To be led of blind leaders is equivalent to falling into the ditch of God's disapproval (Mat. 15:13-14). Each Christian must work out his own salvation with fear and trembling, and this means knowing them that have the rule over you (Phi. 2:12; 1 The. 5:12). It means to esteem them highly **when they are doing what God commanded** them to do, and it means entreating them in meekness if and when they depart from the old paths (1 The. 5:12-13; 1 Tim. 5:1—Wuest translates, “Do not upbraid an elderly man, but entreat him gently as a father”).⁹ Preachers have an obligation to publicly rebuke the elders if they are guilty of misleading the flock (1 Tim. 5:20). If the elders where you attend announce their plans to sell the building and grounds in order to build a gymnasium (they may deceptively call it a **family life center**) which can also be used for worship, then entreat, brethren, entreat. If this happens, you may know they have

forgotten, if they ever knew, the true nature and mission of the Lord's church.

(4) Every member has the right to know every cent that is in the Lord's treasury through regular financial reports. They should be confident that the eldership is carefully avoiding the trap of getting into the savings business. Temporary accumulation of funds due to special circumstances is not under consideration here, but suffice it to say that such accumulation is only temporary while reaching a scriptural goal.

(5) Faithful members of the church have the right to know that the eldership will give only to **scriptural works**. While members need to honor the final decision on the part of the elders when the judgment involved is a choice between two worthy programs, all members must **dishonor** the final decision if it was decided to financially support a false teacher, a missionary society, or build a sports' complex. Why? Simply because: **When any congregation of the Lord's people misuses the Lord's treasury in that which is unscriptural, it serves as evidence of and a reflection of that leadership's misunderstanding of deity's purpose for the church in a lost and dying world.**

FELLOWSHIP AND GIVING SEEN IN HOSPITALITY

Each child of God is to work out his own salvation with fear and trembling (Phi. 2:12). The showing of hospitality to traveling evangelists caused the apostle John to commend Gaius.

Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers; Which have borne witness of thy charity before the church: whom if thou bring forward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well (3 John 5-6).

Lydia, a zealous Christian woman, is a worthy example of showing hospitality to evangelists in her home (Acts 16:15). She was the constraining disciple. Paul taught in Romans 12:13 to be given to hospitality. Moses Lard points out that "given to hospitality" here is from *philoxenia* is literally "love for strangers."¹⁰ The command appears to have reflected the need for hospitality to be shown to Christians unknown by face in the first century as they had been forced by persecution to leave their homes and wander about seeking shelter. It also includes showing love to non-saints.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY

Jesus commended a woman who simply did what she could in His service (Mark 14:8). She did not dwell on what she could not do. While God does not require the impossible from His children, He does require our very best. Some may tend to be liberal in their giving to foreign mission work while neglecting the opportunities in their own communities. Let's send the missionary, but let's also walk across the street in seeking and saving the lost. We are fishers of men, and there are fishing holes everywhere (Luke 5:10; 19:10).

WHAT MUST PREACHERS DO?

Preachers must preach the Word on the true nature and mission of the church. When the pressures of the world influence the spiritually weak to seek to substitute preaching with drama, and when some are unimpressed with simple New Testament worship, God's evangelists must continue to preach the saving words of the living God (Rom. 12:2; 2 Tim. 4:1-4). In preaching the whole counsel of God, preachers must withhold nothing which is profitable concerning fellowship and giving. Expect some to misunderstand, falsely accuse, and mis-characterize your motives when you speak about the **necessity** of proper stewardship. Faithful brethren will uphold your hands. Though the preacher has no authority or desire to become a dictator in the local church, he can at least warn his brethren of God's dictates against supporting specific unscriptural works (Eph. 5:11; 2 John 9-11). "Now we exhort you, brethren, **warn them that are unruly**, comfort the feebleminded, support the weak, be patient toward all *men*" (1 The. 5:14).

Fellowship with God is precious. Nurture it and do not break it with God and with faithful brethren either in the area of (1) personal contributions on the Lord's day, or (2) by sinful behavior in the area of proper stewardship as a leader in the church. Enjoy all spiritual blessings (Eph. 1:3). Stand **for** what is scriptural in this area and **against** what is unscriptural. It is a matter of respect for the authority of God's Word. Finally, let us give God the glory in all things.

ENDNOTES

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FELLOWSHIP AND PREACHING

Mark Mosher



Mark Mosher was born in Erie, Pennsylvania, in 1965. He is the son of Keith, Sr., and Dorothy Mosher. Mark graduated from the Memphis School of Preaching in 1991 and received his B.A. degree from Southern Christian University. He is presently working with the Wesconnett Church of Christ in Jacksonville, Florida.

Mark is married to the former Beckye Bell, and they have two children: Cati and Cassidy.

INTRODUCTION

The theme for this year, *Christian Fellowship*, is timely and much needed. There are those who would speak in terms of “levels of fellowship.” The Bible, however, teaches no such thing. The Bible clearly teaches that one cannot have fellowship with another if that fellowship is not with God (1 John 1:6-7). I am either in fellowship with God, or I am not. Fellowship, then, has for its very foundation **truth**. It is because many have rejected truth that we have such a problem in this area. The subject of this chapter is “Fellowship And Preaching.” We must understand both preaching and fellowship, and then see how the two relate.

BIBLICAL PREACHING

There is no greater privilege in the world than preaching the gospel. Paul declared, “Though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!” (1 Cor. 9:16). Paul helps us to see to whom the glory belongs in preaching: it belongs to God. There are really two kinds of preachers. There is the preacher who glorifies himself and the preacher who glorifies God. The preacher who glorifies himself preaches to tickle the ears of the people (2 Tim. 4:3). The preacher who glorifies God is a gospel preacher, for he declares the whole counsel of God (Acts 20:26-27). In declaring the whole counsel of God, he would most definitely preach on fellowship, for fellowship is

at the very heart of giving glory to God. The difficulty with preaching today is that many people do not want to hear it. We hear people talking in terms of negative and positive preaching rather than scriptural and non-scriptural. Paul declared that

All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

Within this text there is no mention of positive and negative. He simply states that “all scripture” is profitable.

Gospel preachers, therefore, do not think in terms of negative and positive. If it is the Word of God, it is positive. If it means to rebuke, they rebuke; if it means to exhort, they exhort (Tit. 2:15). If it is the Bible, God is speaking, not man, and that is profitable. I am convinced that 70% of the churches of Christ would not accept Jesus Christ as their local preacher because He was simply too negative in His preaching, especially toward the Pharisees (Mat. 23). Most would not put up with an Isaiah or a Jeremiah. One of the reasons we have such trouble in this area is that some have been telling people there are certain parts of God’s Word that should not be spoken. We are told that to preach on the one church, what constitutes acceptable worship, marriage, divorce, and remarriage “drives” people away and should be shunned. We have convinced them that certain parts of the Bible are milk and certain parts are meat, and we should not feed meat to a milk person (Heb. 5-6). Yet, in doing so, we have compartmentalized the Bible declaring to the people that some of God’s Word is too harsh.

The reason some have come to this position is a misconception of Hebrews 5. Some have concluded that the “first principles of the oracles of God” (v. 12) are the ABC’s of Christianity. Given that thought, one would be careful not to teach “meat” passages to one who needs milk. Yet, the passage indicates the teachings of Judaism (Heb. 6:1-3) are the first principles, and that seems to fit the overall purpose of the book. We then need to leave the principles of Christ as taught in Judaism and go on unto perfection (New Testament of Christ). Therefore, Peter states we must desire the Word as newborn babes desire milk. There is not a Scripture in the Bible that is not profitable to me. Therefore, I must proclaim the whole counsel of

God. What we need in the church today are preachers who know the Book and will preach the Book and are not ashamed of the Book—but ashamed only of those who would oppose it.

FELLOWSHIP

The basic meaning of fellowship is found in two Greek words, *koinonia* which means “communion, sharing in common” and *metoche* which means “partnership.”¹ Paul declared that we should “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). He declared in 1 Corinthians 5:9 not to have company with fornicators. He again declared in 2 Corinthians 6:14-16, “Be ye not unequally yoked together.” The fellowship that we enjoy then has its foundation in the Word of God.

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 (1 John 1:6-7).

One then must realize that there can be no fellowship with others who are not walking in the light because they are not in fellowship with God. We must always remember that it is those who oppose truth who are the very cause of disunity and lack of fellowship (Rom. 16:17-18).

Yet, the foundation of fellowship is seen in God’s establishing Israel as a nation of His people. God promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations, and that through his seed all the families of the earth be blessed (Gen. 12:1-3). The fulfillment of this great nation is seen in Israel. The first numbering in the wilderness of those males 20 years old and upward able to go to war was 603,550, thus showing God’s fulfillment of that promise. This nation established by God, however, would need to unite as one nation. They would need a fellowship that would strengthen their ties together. To do this, God made Israel a distinct and different people. He intended to make them different (peculiar from other nations) to keep them together and fulfill their purpose of giving glory to God. Therefore, God established the Feast of the Passover to make them different. He changed their calendar (Exo. 12:2), and He instituted the Passover which became the first sacrifice offered as a nation of God’s people (Exo. 12:6). The Passover would be a means by which their children would know how God formed this nation (Exo. 12:26-27). No doubt, there were other nations, but this was the only nation formed by God

for His purpose and in connection with His promise. Other nations were found only in rebellion against God (Gen. 11). Yet, the institution of the Passover had a part in drawing the people together as a unit. They faced a common danger (death of firstborn). In facing that danger, direction was given so it could be avoided. Therefore, the Passover was given, not to be celebrated by individuals, but rather as a whole nation. No doubt, the very institution of the Lord's Supper today has much the same purpose. Paul declared that Christ today is our Passover (1 Cor. 5:7). The Lord's Supper, then, is expressive of the unity and fellowship we have as God's people. It shows a separation from the world (1 Cor. 10:16-21). It shows the fellowship we have with God.

GOD GAVE THEM CLEAN AND UNCLEAN ANIMALS

Leviticus 11 states a list of animals that were regarded as clean and unclean. The underlying principle given for these laws is stated in Leviticus 11:44-47.

For I *am* the LORD your God: ye shall therefore sanctify yourselves, and ye shall be holy; for I *am* holy: neither shall ye defile yourselves with any manner of creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. For I *am* the LORD that bringeth you up out of the land of Egypt, to be your God: ye shall therefore be holy, for I *am* holy. This is the law of the beasts, and of the fowl, and of every living creature that moveth in the waters, and of every creature that creepeth upon the earth: To make a difference between the unclean and the clean, and between the beast that may be eaten and the beast that may not be eaten.

They were to be holy, as God is holy. In doing so, they could glorify God to the world and fulfill their purpose as God's people. They could not turn the heart of a pagan world toward God if they were in fellowship with that world. Therefore, God stated in Leviticus 11:24-26:

And for these ye shall be unclean: whosoever toucheth the carcase of them shall be unclean until the even. And whosoever beareth *ought* of the carcase of them shall wash his clothes, and be unclean until the even. *The carcasses* of every beast which divideth the hoof, and is not clovenfooted, nor cheweth the cud, *are* unclean unto you: every one that toucheth them shall be unclean.

God knew that food was used for hospitality, fellowship. Therefore, to make certain foods as clean or unclean would cease social contacts between Israel and pagan, idolatrous nations. Neither would God permit His people to intermarry. This principle was abused by

the Jews, for they felt that the Gentiles were not equal in the sight of God. Yet, the separation was not to teach the lesson of inequality but rather to keep them from the influence of idolatry.

GOD ESTABLISHED A PRIESTHOOD, A TABERNACLE, AND SACRIFICE

Through priesthood, sacrifice, and a place (tabernacle), Israel had the means to approach God and be in fellowship with Him as His people. The only way one can be holy before God is through the provisions God has made. The character and tenor of our life must be one of faithfulness to God. One cannot live a life of neglect, worldly living, sinful living and then attempt to assemble with God's people and enjoy His fellowship. No doubt, all have sinned (Rom. 3:23; 1 John 1:8-10), but we can use the provisions God has given so we can be faithful in our service. Today, God has provided a way of approach. He gave us a priesthood—Christ and the church (1 Pet. 2:5, 9; Heb. 3:1), He gave us the sacrifice (Christ), and He gave us the place of approach (church, body of Christ). Without using these provisions we can never be in fellowship with God or His people. The Mosaic priesthood, however, had a special privilege, for they were allowed to enter the tabernacle and draw near to God. In the same fashion, Christians as God's priests can draw near to Him (Heb. 10:18-23). Yet with this privilege goes responsibility. The primary function of the priest was to teach, "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts" (Mal. 2:7). This became the downfall of Israel for the priests neglected the law (Mal. 2:8-10; Hos. 4). As God's priests today (1 Pet. 2:5), our primary function is to teach. We teach by retaining our distinction, we teach by following God's directions, and we teach by showing others those directions so they can be in fellowship with God and with His people.

PREACHING AND FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship is the distinguishing feature that united and strengthened the early church. Paul declared to the church at Corinth:

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

He reminded them that he and the brethren were “labourers together with God” (1 Cor. 3:9). Paul was trying to combat the spirit of factionalism and to show the strength in being together working for one cause and one purpose. No doubt, when fellowship is ignored, then the strength of our ties in reaching out to the lost are weakened. We must see the benefit of seeking “sweet counsel together” (Psa. 55:14). We must work together in preaching and teaching the Word of God. Is it not a joy to visit fellow congregations during a gospel meeting and counsel together in proclaiming the Word of God? Paul declared that we should “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel” (Phi. 1:27). Paul prayed for their fellowship in the gospel (Phi. 1:5a). If the church is to be as God wants it to be, then there must be a joy in working together for the cause of Christ. There must be a partnership in the work of the gospel. When one becomes a child of God, from that day forward, there must be an active participation in the work of the gospel. Paul remembered the fellowship he as a gospel preacher enjoyed with those at Philippi “from the first day until now” (Phi. 1:5b). No doubt, he remembered Lydia. How great was the day he met her: he taught her the gospel, and she opened her will to God and obeyed that gospel. Here was a woman who lived in the darkness of paganism, having found some light in Judaism and coming to the full light in Christ. No doubt, Paul remembered the Philippian jailer—a man who was wicked and hardened against Paul and Silas, a man who watched or had a part in their beating, a man who placed them in chains, stocks, and bonds. He did not care that their backs were bleeding; yet when the earthquake came, Paul said, “Do thyself no harm: for we are all here” (Acts 16:28). This jailer had never known a man like that before. Yet he not only saved his physical life, more importantly he saved his soul in preaching. What a tremendous joy there is in that fellowship!

Preachers must realize that if one is to enjoy fellowship with God, it will be in preaching the truth, for it is in truth that we have the very foundation of fellowship (John 17:17). When one has the will to remain in error, then God has commanded that we withdraw our fellowship. The reason is that when one has crossed God’s line of demarcation, we must choose whether we will stand with God or with error. We must choose whether we will be a partaker with God or with false teachers. One reason why there is confusion is too many

preachers have preached “disfellowship” rather than “withdrawing fellowship.” *Disfellowship* is not a biblical term. When a brother in Christ refuses to repent, then we are required to withdraw our fellowship as he no longer walks in truth (2 The. 3:6, 14). A man that is preaching error and no longer stands for truth is one from whom we withdraw our fellowship and teach others to do the same (Rom. 16:17). The Bible says nothing of different kinds or levels of fellowship. We are either a partner with God, or we are not. A gospel preacher, then, who stands with God cannot participate in lecture-ships, meetings, and/or workshops of those who are teaching error.

We read concerning the sin offering (Lev. 4) a distinction made between the priest, ruler, congregation, and the common man. This distinction must be understood in light of the responsibility of each. There is a clear distinction made between responsibility and the position of knowledge. One of the functions of priesthood was to instruct the people (Mal. 2:7-12; Hos. 4:6). Their position of responsibility and instruction shows that their knowledge of sin should be greater than other people’s. With an increase of knowledge comes an increase of responsibility. With an increase of responsibility comes an increase in influence. God does not make a distinction between sins, but He does show that our influence can be greater because of our position. No doubt the sins of a preacher are not different than the sins of others. Yet, in light of his position, the damage he can do may be much greater. For this reason a preacher places himself on a higher plane. He must be careful about his associations both among the world and among false teachers. No doubt for this very reason Paul requested prayers (Rom. 15:30). In like manner, a distinction is made in the sin offering of the whole congregation (Lev. 4:13). Israel is to be a light to the whole world. Think of the influence the whole congregation would have before the world. When a congregation of God’s people is in sin, think about its influence. It is for this reason that when a congregation is in sin, we withdraw our fellowship lest we lose our influence with the truth of God’s Word. The same distinction is made with the rulers (Lev. 4:22). Think of the influence of the eldership. What happens to that influence when they condone error in the pulpit and fail to do what is necessary to spare the flock from it? The same distinction is made with the common man (Lev. 4:27). No one is above God’s law, and no one is below God’s law. Rather all

must obey God's law and realize the influence they have before the world.

CONCLUSION

There is no greater fellowship one can enjoy than the fellowship that is associated with preaching—to be able to call another a brother or sister in Christ—to share in the work of the gospel—to enjoy the blessings of God together. How saddened, therefore, we are when others break that fellowship through ungodly living or ungodly teaching. May we ever strive to follow God's directions and encourage others to do the same.

ENDNOTE

¹W. E. Vine, *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1985), pp. 115, 122.

FELLOWSHIP AND MISSION WORK

Ira Y. Rice, Jr.



Ira Y. Rice, Jr., was born August 3, 1917 at Franklin, Texas. He is the son of Ira Y. Rice Sr., and the former Eula Edna Davis. Baptized at the age of twelve by A. R. Holton, at Norman, Oklahoma, Ira began preaching while yet a boy, in 1932. After ministries at Noble and Paul's Valley, Oklahoma; Edcouch and Mercedes, Texas; Paso Robles, San Rafael, Richmond and San Francisco, California; and, Seattle, Washington, he went, in 1955, to plant the churches of Christ in Singapore, Malaysia, and Southeast Asia where he spent several years in mission work.

Having now been preaching for over sixty years, Ira is the Editor of two monthly periodicals, *Contending For The Faith* and *The Far East/World Evangelism Newsletter*. He is also the author of several books. He is a co-founder and President of Four Seas College of Bible and Missions in Singapore, and has served as Chairman of its Board of Directors since 1968. He has been a missionary to the Far East under the oversight of the elders of the Bellview Church of Christ, Pensacola, Florida, since 1978. Ira has preached the Gospel in over sixty countries around the world and recently helped to establish the church of Christ in Latvia.

When Jesus Christ uttered the Great Commission just before levitating from the earth and a cloud receiving Him out of their sight, not only did He bind that commission upon His eleven apostles but, through them, upon all His other disciples as well.

If all we had to go on were the accounts of Mark and Luke, perhaps we should not know this information.

MARK'S ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Mark's extraordinary account does not make clear that others besides the apostles were bound by the Great Commission. Mark records the event, as follows, saying:

Afterward he appeared unto the eleven as they sat at meat, and up-braided them with their unbelief and hardness of heart, because they believed not them which had seen him after he was risen. And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned...So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, he was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God. And they went forth, and preached every where, the Lord

working with *them*, and confirming the word with signs following. Amen (Mark 16:14-16, 19-20).

LUKE'S ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

Luke records this same event in two places. First, in the Book of Luke, he writes:

Then opened he their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in his name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem...And he led them out as far as to Bethany, and he lifted up his hands, and blessed them. And it came to pass, while he blessed them, he was parted from them, and carried up into heaven (Luke 24:45-47, 50-51).

This same writer, Luke, in the first chapter of Acts, states thus: "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" (Acts 1:8).

MATTHEW'S ACCOUNT OF THE GREAT COMMISSION

But it is not until we read and study **Matthew's** account that we realize that responsibility for fulfilling the Great Commission extends far beyond the eleven apostles to whom it first was spoken. In Matthew we read:

Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. And when they saw him, they worshipped him: but some doubted. And Jesus came and spake unto them, saying, All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, *even* unto the end of the world. Amen (Mat. 28:16-20).

It is from the first eleven words of Matthew 28:20 that we come to see that "Go ye" includes "Go we." Read them again: "teaching them [i.e., those taught and baptized in all nations] to observe **all things whatsoever I have commanded you.**" Well, what things had He just commanded them? To "**Go** ye therefore, and **teach** all nations, baptizing them."

APOSTLES MAY NOT HAVE UNDERSTOOD—AT FIRST

It could be that the apostles themselves did not understand this—at first. They heard what Jesus **said** all right; however, in the chapters immediately following Pentecost, neither they nor those they taught and baptized made a move outside Jerusalem itself.

Truly, they taught and trained new converts to continue steadfastly in “the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers” (Acts 2:42). Those converted continued “daily with one accord in the temple” (Acts 2:46). And “daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ” (Acts 5:42). However, all of this evidently was done **inside Jerusalem!**

DID IT TAKE A PERSECUTION TO CONVINCE THEM?

It is not until the first few verses of Acts 8 that we see any effort at all to extend the saving gospel beyond the confines of Jerusalem, *per se*. Even then, it was not the **apostles**, who went, at first, but **those they had been teaching and training in Jerusalem**.

It was after the death of Stephen (Acts 7) that

there was a great persecution against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles...Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word (Acts 8:1, 4).

It was in this connection that we learn of Philip (not an apostle) going down to Samaria and preaching Christ unto them (Acts 8:5). It was only **after** the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that the Samaritans **already** had received the Word that they sent two apostles, Peter and John, unto them (Acts 8:14).

APOSTLES’ FIRST PREACHING BEYOND JERUSALEM

The first reference we have of **apostles** preaching outside of Jerusalem is Acts 8:25. After Peter and John had their episode with Simon—the Simon that Philip already had converted from sorcery—they “testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.” The rest of the chapter is devoted to **Philip’s** preaching the gospel to and baptizing the Ethiopian eunuch (v. 35), and, passing through Azotus, preaching in all the cities between there and Ceasarea.

Of course, **once the apostles got started** preaching in Samaria and Judea, they and others spread the word far and wide.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT SOON BECAME NECESSARY

It should be self-evident, however, that the farther reaches of the Great Commission could not be accomplished without some sort of financial support in the mission work they were doing.

The apostle Paul alludes to this in Romans 10:13-15, wherein he says:

For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher? And how shall they preach, except they be sent?

In 2 Corinthians 4:7, Paul says, “We have this treasure in earthen vessels.” The gospel does not move in and of itself; it moves through you and me. Some of us have to **go**—others need to **send**.

But if all were **goers**, who would do the **sending**? Or if all were **senders**, who would do the **going**? It takes **both** the goers and the senders to accomplish God’s purpose. As Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 3:9, “we are labourers **together** with God.”

ONLY TWO AVENUES OF EFFECTIVENESS OPEN

There are only these two avenues through which Christians can be of any use wherein the Great Commission is concerned—going and sending. The most direct avenue, of course, is by **going ourselves, in person, and doing the teaching and preaching** required. Some, however, should not **be** teachers (Jam. 3:1). That leaves the **second** avenue open to **all the rest**. We **all** can be **senders**, i.e., **have fellowship in support those who go in mission work**.

To the extent that you or I **go** preach or teach, the gospel goes through us. To the extent that you or I **stay home**, the gospel **stays put**. It cannot go in and of itself.

To the extent that you or I **support** those who go preach and teach, the gospel is **sent**. But to the extent that you or I keep our money in our billfolds, purses, bank accounts—or even the churches’ bank accounts—the Lord cannot **use** us—simply because we refused to **be** used.

SAUL'S MINISTRY BEGAN BEYOND JERUSALEM

At least one of the apostles **began** his ministry by preaching **beyond Jerusalem**. We read of Saul's conversion in Damascus (Acts 9). Immediately after his baptism, verse 20 tells us, "And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God." In verse 27, Barnabas declared how "he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus."

When he did the same thing in Jerusalem, and disputed with the Grecians, they went about to slay him; So the brethren brought him forth to Caesarea, and from thence he went to his home city of Tarsus.

PETER OPENS DOOR TO GENTILES BEYOND JERUSALEM

In Acts 10 and 11 we read of Peter's opening the door of faith to the Gentiles at the household of Cornelius in Caesarea. (The second part of Acts 11 shows that they who were "scattered abroad" by the persecution that arose after the death of Stephen "travelled as far as Phoenicia, and Cyprus, and Antioch, speaking the word to none save only to Jews.")

When word came to Jerusalem what was happening up the coast to their north, they sent Barnabas as far as Antioch, who, in turn when he saw the situation, traveled on over to Tarsus "for to seek Saul." When he had found him, he brought him to Antioch, where for "a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people" (Acts 11:26).

ANTIOCH SENDS SAUL, BARNABAS TO REGIONS BEYOND

It is not until we get to Acts 13:1-3 that we learn of Saul and Barnabas being sent on their first missionary journey from Antioch. The account does not say **how** any of this early mission work was **financed**.

From what Saul (by then called Paul) wrote to the Philippians, and also to the Corinthians some years later, it is implied that those who **received** the gospel also **supported** those who brought it to them—though Paul did not always **accept** such support.

PHILIPPIANS GAVE TO PAUL'S SUPPORT

There was a time when no church other than the Philippians sent directly to Paul's support, as we learn from Philippians 4:10-16:

But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity. Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, *therewith* to be content. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

PAUL DID NOT ACCEPT SUCH SUPPORT EVERYWHERE

As mentioned earlier, though he **did** accept **the Philippians'** support, he did **not** accept support in all instances from those where he went, e.g., at Corinth.

In 1 Corinthians 9 Paul has quite a discussion relative to forgoing his right to be supported by them while there. After asking, "Have we not power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" (vv. 4-5), Paul further asks, "Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working?" (v. 6).

In the next several verses, Paul argues that it would have been right for the Corinthians to support him even though, for their sake, he had forgone this right. He reasons:

Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock? Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? For it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen? Or saith he *it* altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, *this* is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, *is it* a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things? If others be partakers of *this* power over you, *are* not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should

hinder the gospel of Christ. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live *of the things* of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for *it were* better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void (1 Cor. 9:7-15).

AT CORINTH PAUL SUPPORTED HIMSELF

How was it possible for Paul to do all the mission work he did at Corinth at no charge to the Corinthians? We are not left to wonder. Luke makes this clear in Acts 18.

Leaving Athens, Paul traveled approximately 50 miles west to the great city of Corinth. There he found a Jew and his wife, Aquila and Priscilla, and because they were of the same craft, i.e., tent-makers, verse 3 says, “He abode with them, and wrought.”

This is what he meant when he reminded the Corinthians of their “labour, working with our own hands” (1 Cor. 4:12). By thus supporting himself, while at Corinth, he was able to be “glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied” (1 Cor. 9:18). It may be, however, that what Paul earned with his own hands sometimes was insufficient to his needs. Writing to the Corinthians from Ephesus, at the end of 1 Corinthians, he mentions being “glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus: for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied” (16:17)

UNINFORMED BRETHREN ASK, “WHY NOT NOW?”

Occasionally, brethren who are not acquainted with the arbitrary conditions that today are imposed by many countries, wonder why missionaries cannot be supported by the churches they plant on the field, or, in lieu of that, support themselves by working with their own hands “like Paul.”

In a few instances, such may be possible. For example, I think of the Lawson Mayos in Australia. They went there years ago, lost their support from “back home,” and now have been on self-support in Melbourne for quite a long time.

On the other hand, **most** countries **will not allow** missionaries even to **enter** their borders without (1) financial **sponsorship** from their own home country, and (2) a **guarantee** from said sponsors that

they will **not become a public liability** to the country where they do their missionary work; thus they will not even **permit** missionaries to do **secular** work for a living as Paul did.

WE HAVE TO ADJUST TO REQUIREMENTS OF EACH COUNTRY

When Vada and I first volunteered as missionaries for Singapore and Southeast Asia, we had not a clue what all would be involved. Neither did most congregations and elderships.

Even the Central Seattle congregation where I then preached did not understand what *sponsorship* meant. In a business meeting they agreed that if I could not find a church with elders to sponsor our going to Singapore, they would take it on. (At the time we had no elders.)

While I was gone seeking a church with elders to sponsor us, the son-in-law of one of our leading members took it on himself to ask a **lawyer** what sponsorship meant. The lawyer knew nothing of the inner workings of churches of Christ. He convinced that young man that sponsorship meant that the sponsoring church would be responsible for all the money I raised—and that, if my missionary work did not succeed, the sponsoring church would have to repay all donors even if it required selling their houses, cars, and all their possessions!

Talk about bedlam! By the time I got home from that trip, instead of **sponsoring** us, the Central Seattle church was ready to **crucify** me for even **thinking** of putting them into such financial jeopardy! (Of course they were **not** in jeopardy—or even about to be; but they **thought** they were! Just like that, they withdrew their offer to sponsor; so I had to continue looking elsewhere for sponsorship.)

18 MONTHS LOST SEEKING SPONSORSHIP AND SUPPORT

It took **seven months** of unremitting inquiry finally to locate a church with elders who would sponsor us to Singapore—then eleven **more** months to line up the financial support so we could actually *go*.

Many of the churches and individuals promised to help support us **after** we got to the field, but not to help us **get** there! (Mull that one over, if you will. They were so sure we'd never even make it to Singapore that they thought they would never be out a single cent! No

wonder Paul listed “covetousness” right along with fornication, idolatry, railing, drunkenness and extortion in 1 Corinthians 6:9-11!)

Of those who **did** promise to help, **once we got on the field**, at least a third of them reneged even on **that** promise. Thus, the first year that we were actually **in** Singapore, it was touch-and-go whether we’d be able to **stay**. During one 19-day stretch, we did not have **ten cents** in the house. It got so bad that I kept the road hot to the pawn shop hocking things of value. At one point we even had to sell furniture right out of the house just to be able to eat. (It was during that tragically destitute time that I received a letter from one of our anti brethren charging us with “living it up on the brotherhood”!)

BALD-HEADED LADY WITH A FORELOCK

Ancient Greeks conceived of *opportunity* as a bald-headed lady with a forelock. To take hold of opportunity, one had to grasp her by the forelock; otherwise, once she got by you, nothing was left to take hold of, so your fingers would simply slide off her bald pate.

IF brethren and churches had not been so tight-fisted with their fellowship the first year or two that we were in Singapore and Malaysia, I have no doubt that the gospel could have practically saturated those two countries and from there radiated into other countries as well.

At least **ten** preacher-families had purposed to join Vada and me in the work within a year after our arrival. Either for want of sponsorship or lack of support, **not one** of those would-be missionary-families ever came. By the time some others **did** arrive, years later, doors that were so receptive at first already were closing. What a marvelous opportunity got by us simply because the necessary fellowship was not extended to take hold.

WHAT SHALL WE DO NOW?

Even since I have been writing this manuscript, phone call after phone call has been received from brethren seeking sponsorship and/or fellowship so they could go work in this or that mission field.

Jimmie B. Hill, once a missionary to American Samoa, called asking if I knew of a congregation who would send him to Ghana. Shelly Stem, of Nashville, wrote seeking help to go work in Honduras. Shyam Salam, of northeast India, told of special opportunities

opening in the Himalayan Hindu country of Nepal. Tito Peralta wrote repeatedly of opportunities in his native Philippine city of Davao.

When we receive such urgent telephone calls and letters, to the extent the Lord enables us personally, Vada and I try to respond. On the other hand, it should be obvious that such opportunities are beyond the capacity of any **one** family or congregation. However, as my mother used to say, “Many hands make light work.”

If brethren and churches would follow the admonitions of Paul, being always “ready unto every good work,” as “workers together with God,” all of us—together—are equal to the task. Let us not grieve our souls on Judgment Day that we failed to observe one of the “all things” commanded because we neither went ourselves nor sent our fellowship to those seeking the lost among all nations—world-wide.

LIMITS OF CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP

Tom Wacaster



Tom Wacaster is a native of Texas. He is a graduate of Brown Trail School of Preaching and attended East Central University in Ada, Oklahoma. Tom began preaching in 1972 and has served congregations in Oklahoma and Texas. He has done mission work in South Africa, Zimbabwe, Botswana, Russia and Ukraine. Tom serves as teacher at the Houston College of the Bible in Spring, Texas, and works with the church in Baytown, Texas.

Tom and his wife Johnnie Ann have two children and four grandchildren.

The theme of the Twenty-third Annual Bellview Lectures, “Christian Fellowship,” is certainly timely. From what we observe taking place in the brotherhood, one would think that few have any concept of what constitutes *fellowship*. Some folks think fellowship is something you do in the church “fellowship hall” while attempting to balance a paper plate piled high with food in one hand and a glass of iced tea in the other. Some of the self-designated “change agents” think fellowship is limitless, no “holds barred,” and full steam ahead on the good ship “Fellow-ship.” Who cares if there is a little diversity or difference of opinion. After all, “We’re all headed for the same shore; we just happen to have a little different opinion as to how to get there!” So what if the navigational chart and compass have been thrown overboard? It like that captain aboard the Boeing 747 who told his passengers: “We’ve lost all navigational equipment, our radios are out of order, and we have no earthly idea where we are. But, hey, we’re making **g-r-e-a-t** time!” Two years ago (if not before) Mark Henderson threw away his compass and chart at the Abilene Lectures. Here is a portion of his speech:

Another preacher asked me to meet him at the Ministerial Fellowship’s weekly prayer meeting. Our’s is the only Church of Christ in Boulder, so I accepted the chance to meet these **colleagues in minis-**

try [emphasis mine, TW], though I had some anxiety about how we would deal with our many differences. I needn't have worried. Those 15 or 20 men didn't come together to debate; they came together each week to get to the serious business of prayer. As I sat there the better part of an hour, I found a lump forming in my throat while I listened to these men from so many different fellowships unite with one voice before the Lord for the sake of each other and for the sake of the lost of Boulder. Finally, I interrupted and told them who I was and which church I was from. I told them about struggles we were facing in our church, and asked for their prayers [sort of like Elijah asking the prophets of Baal to pray for him, TW]. Nothing in my experience could have prepared me for what happened next. For the next ten minutes, all they did was pray for me and our congregation.... As I listened to the voices of all those men, whom many of us have regarded as enemies, flooding me and flooding us with their prayers, great tears of release began to roll down my cheeks as I received the anointing with the precious oil of unity.¹

Bill Banowsky threw his navigation chart and compass away more than a decade ago when he joined hands with the Methodist Church on January 5, 1986, and lauded the preacher and congregation of that man-made institution. He then burned his bridges behind him at the afore-mentioned ACU Lectures when he advocated fellowship with denominationalism. In his speech brother Banowsky admitted that he had outgrown the idea of "an identifiably exclusive church." He went so far as to suggest that those who presently hold to the old paths confess our "self-righteousness to our neighbors" and instead of isolating ourselves from them, join hands with them in those things in which we can agree. He sees the "other sheep" of John 10:16 as a reference to those in the denominations, and suggests that we extend fellowship to them. Oh, yes, he has thrown his chart and compass overboard into the depths of the sea.

Rubel Shelly not only lost his chart and compass, he abandoned ship in the early 80s, and has been floundering in the muddy waters of "unity in diversity" in a sinking life raft named "The U.S.S. New Hermeneutic." Down in San Antonio, Texas, Max Lucado com-
mended

the great and notable work that God has done through this [Trinity Oaks Baptist] church over the last decade. To accept you, to extend a hand of love and appreciation; to cast our vote in favor of you, as fellow-workers in this great dream that we have.²

The fact that these men, and others like them, receive such a great following is evidence that there is an abysmal ignorance on the subject of fellowship. Some of the change agents will suggest that the circle of fellowship in the early years of the Restoration Movement in America was much larger than we presently make it. But we would point out that the Restoration pioneers are not the authority. Brother Roger Campbell noted:

The great men of the Restoration Movement who planted thousands of congregations of God's people in this country are worthy of our honor, admiration, and thankfulness....However, the practices of the Restoration Movement were not without shortcomings. It is my opinion that the Christians of that time period did not properly teach and practice the Biblical doctrine of fellowship. We ought to learn from their mistakes and avoid the errors which were present in that time.³

Yes, there is a need for more preaching and writing on fellowship, and we are grateful to the elders at Bellview for conducting a lecture-ship on such a timely subject.

One of the first passages, if not indeed the very first passage in the New Testament that mentions *fellowship* is Acts 2:42. After Peter's sermon and invitation, there were three thousand that responded to the gospel's call, and having received the Word, were baptized (Acts 2:41). Luke then tells us that "they continued stedfastly in the apostles' teaching and fellowship, in the breaking of bread and the prayers." There is something about *fellowship* that leaves you with a warm feeling. We share a "like precious faith" (2 Pet. 1:1), a common faith (Eph. 4:4), and a single hope for an "inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away" (1 Pet. 1:4). Salvation is for all, but not all will enjoy salvation (Mat. 7:13-14). Likewise, fellowship with God is available unto all, but not all will enjoy that fellowship. There are "limitations of fellowship." We did not set, nor can we loose, the limitations that the Almighty has set with regard to fellowship. Brother Robert Taylor is correct in noting:

God does the defining of fellowship and its is his regal right to do so. Jehovah sets the boundaries of Christian fellowship and it is his prerogative so to do. He determines whom he will and will not fellowship; he determines whom we are to fellowship and whom we are not to fellowship...God has treated the doctrine of fellowship like he has the doctrine of conversion. He sets the stipulations; he legislates the laws; he conveys the conditions; he defines the demands.⁴

God determines what we should do and it is our obligation to determine precisely what God wants us to do. The creature does not tell the Creator; rather the Creator instructs the creature. All authority resides in Christ (Mat. 28:18; Col. 1:18). If He has set limits on who is and who is not to be fellowshiped, we can only comply. We shall approach our study under three headings: (1) **A definition of terms**, in which we will seek to define some terms individually and collectively; (2) **An examination of certain pertinent passages**, in which we will examine a number of scriptures that either clearly state or imply limits of fellowship; and finally, (3) **Application in three areas**, in which we will seek to apply the truths learned and come to some conclusions.

A DEFINITION OF TERMS

An argument properly defined is an argument half won. *Limitation* is defined by Webster in this way: "The act of limiting, bounding, or circumscribing....restriction; qualification." When we look up *limit* we find: "That which terminates, circumscribes, or confines; a bound, border, utmost extent; to set limits or bounds to; to confine within certain bounds" (Webster). The very idea of **limitations** runs counter to our modern culture. A pluralistic society wants no limitations. Hence, absolutes are out; acceptance and toleration is in. But whether we like it or not, a world without limitations is a world of chaos. Alan Bloom, in his book, *The Closing of the American Mind* wrote:

There is one thing a professor can be absolutely certain of: almost every student entering the university believes, or says he believes, that truth is relative...The students' backgrounds are as various as America can provide. Some are religious, some atheists; some are to the Left, some to the Right; some intend to be scientists, some humanists or professionals or businessmen; some are poor, some rich. They are unified only in their relativism and in their allegiance to equality.⁵

This particular philosophy (if we can call it that) has literally saturated American society, yea, the whole of the western world. It is just such a philosophy that ignores limits and gives the "green light" to every imagination that might come down the pike. The first plank in this insidious philosophy is the desire for unity at any cost. Bloom calls it "allegiance to equality."

On the moral front this battle is being waged against those who want to "impose their morality upon others." (Have you ever noticed

that certain words and phrases have a connotation that will actually bias the thinking of otherwise reasonable thinking men and women? “Homophobia” is a good example here.) The homosexual community is presently pushing for this particular equality. It is not an equality with regard to human rights, but an equality that wants acceptance, regardless of lifestyle. The bottom line is that they desire a muzzle be placed on the mouths of all those who oppose their practice. This, my friends, is the kind of equality under consideration. If lawmakers can be convinced that opposition to ungodly behavior is really inequality gone to seed, then they will succeed in muzzling the mouths of those who presently oppose their practice by passing laws favorable to immorality.

On the religious front it is toleration and agreement to disagree. It is not so much the desire on the part of the leaders to become united in practice as it is the desire to muzzle any opposition. “You do your thing; I’ll do mine; and let’s not criticize one another.” But in order to attain to such “equality” it is necessary that there first be a removal of any absolute standard. Hence, the second plank: the modern gospel of relativism. “Nothing is absolute; nothing is certain; you can’t know anything for sure.” Now, one might expect the world to think this way. Wickedness and error have always sought to cast off the restraints of God’s will (Psa. 2:3). But of late we are hearing some of our brethren advocate the same kind of thinking. On the far left we find those who are nothing more than relativists. They have climbed aboard the bandwagon of relativism and proclaim without fear of God or man, “You can’t know anything for sure!” (I wonder how they can be so sure about that!). What is it that has backed them into this corner? It is, I believe, the desire for the kind of equality spoken of above—equality to do as they please, and simply agree to disagree, while muzzling the mouths of those who might criticize. Again, to accomplish their desired end, there must be a removal of any absolute standard.

We are presently witnessing a headlong plunge into a full acceptance of this two-planked error. First, there is the desire for some kind of unity. This is a noble desire, based of course upon the prayer of our Lord recorded in John 17, but alas it is not the type of unity of which Jesus spake. Enter plank one: “Let’s agree to disagree.” Workshops are organized which invite men of every shade and color (doctrinally

speaking) with no intention of addressing error, but rather presenting a “united front” regardless of differences in doctrine. Known false teachers are not rebuked, but revered and respected. Opposition is squelched by subjective thinking rather than objective reasoning. No longer is it the false teacher who is the enemy, but those who cry out for truth and justice. Enter plank two: Remove or ignore the standard. Lip service is given to a “thus saith the Lord” while sound, biblical arguments are ignored. The “fruit” which error bears is looked at through colored glasses, and the circle of relativism and equality is now complete.

The second word that begs defining is *fellowship*. Our English derives from the Greek word *koinonia*. Thayer defines the word as “fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation; the share that anyone has in anything.”⁶ The word is used to describe the bond of fellowship that unites Christians together. W. E. Vine defines the Greek *koinonia* thusly: “Communion, fellowship, sharing in common...to have fellowship with or in.”⁷ Arndt and Gingrich define *koinonia* as “association, communion, fellowship, close relationship,” with a secondary meaning of “generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism.”⁸ This Greek word appears more than twenty times in the New Testament in such passages as Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 1:9; Galatians 2:9; Philippians 1:5; 1 John 1:3, 6-7. A closely related noun, *koinonos* is defined by Thayer as “a partner, associate, sharer in anything.”⁹ Arndt and Gingrich define this word as “one who takes part in something with someone.”¹⁰ In his excellent commentary on 1 John, brother Guy N. Woods had this comment on fellowship:

Fellowship is partnership, joint sharing. Through the acceptance of the Word of life a unity of faith, practice and worship is established, and it was for this purpose that the life was being declared. Here, in the most emphatic fashion, the writer points out that only in unity of faith is there communion in religion. It is possible to have fellowship only when there is a common bond established in faith, work, and love.¹¹

So far as this study is concerned, we shall define and use the word *fellowship* as pertaining to **participation with** and **encouragement of** one another in those matters concerning THE faith, and our walk therein. Quite obviously we cannot avoid association with those about us who are not members of the body of Christ. We cannot, as Paul says, “go out of the world” (1 Cor. 5:10b). To the contrary we are to

render our influence for the good of others, and the uplifting of the Christ to the glory of God the Father. Any association with the world is fraught with the danger that we would succumb to their way of thinking (Rom. 12:1-2). We must, therefore, avoid any **encouragement of** those in sin to the extent that they conclude that their present condition (morally or religiously) is acceptable unto God. Nor can there be participation with them in any activity (morally or religiously) wherein we fail to uphold and maintain the lines of demarcation between truth and error, sin and righteousness, or light and darkness. When brethren have the opportunity to attend or speak at some denominational gathering, for example, they simply cannot, must not, leave the impression with those in error that we either approve of what they are doing, nor can we encourage them in any way in the course they are presently following.

Hence, our study, "Limits of Fellowship." Combined, these two words imply there are bounds beyond which we simply cannot pass (2 John 9; 1 Cor. 4:6). The very preparation, printing, and presentation of this lesson implies that we believe there are certain restrictions placed upon us by God Almighty with regard to whom we can fellowship. No doubt there will be those who cry out, "You are drawing your circle of fellowship too small." But friends, if God has drawn the circle, then I have no right to seek to enlarge it.

AN EXAMINATION OF CERTAIN PERTINENT PASSAGES

Before looking at the specific passages, there are a couple of preliminary remarks that need to be addressed. The first of these has to do with authority. Jeremiah reminds us that "the way of man is not in himself: it is not in man that walketh to direct his steps" (Jer. 10:23). Man simply does not have it within himself to chart his own course in matters pertaining to salvation and holy living. Book, chapter, and verse preaching may not be popular to some, but it is the only kind that is acceptable to God (Col. 3:17). It is not the scope of this chapter to deal with authority, but a serious study of how to establish and ascertain authority would go a long way toward settling the matter of who and who should not be included in our fellowship. Second, we should keep in mind that fellowship is to be extended only to those who walk in harmony with God's Word. Brother N. B. Hardeman said:

Fellowship means oneness, unity, and coherence among the members of any organization...Unity means the combination of elements of the same composition. It follows, therefore, that if men are united and have fellowship in the church of the Lord, they must be converted precisely as the Bible directs, and they must be of the "same mind and the same judgment"...We cannot fellowship those who have not obeyed the gospel of God's Son.¹²

We cannot include in our fellowship those whom God has excluded, nor can we exclude those whom God has included. Those among us who are expanding their fellowship to include those whom God has actually excluded have leaned too far to one side, seeking to obtain "unity" at the cost of faithfulness to God's Word. With regard to God's law of inclusion, brother Warren wrote:

The Bible teaches that we are to recognize as God's children—and, thus, as people in fellowship with God—only those who have done what the Bible teaches is necessary to attain such a status...Two men attain unto Christian fellowship with one another by each attaining fellowship with God (1 John 1:3). This is God's law of inclusion.¹³

Fellowship with God is obtained when, and only when, one obeys the gospel of Christ and becomes a child of God. John so states in 1 John 1:6-7:

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the 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 his Son cleanseth us from all sin.

Those, and only those, who are **included** in the body of Christ are to be recipients of the right hand of fellowship.

We are now ready to look closely at some passages that clearly teach that there are indeed limits of fellowship. The first of these is **Matthew 18:15-17**. Here we learn that the *offender*, should he refuse to repent, is to be excluded from the church. Such a one is to be "unto thee as the Gentile and the publican" (v. 17). But since we are to have "no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11), then the obvious conclusion is that those who refuse to repent of sins, after the proper procedure, are to be excluded from fellowship.

In **Romans 16:17-18**, Paul wrote, "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them." There is a two-fold responsibility that we have toward those who cause division in the Lord's church. First, we are to "mark them."

This means we are to “fix one’s eyes upon and direct attention to.” Having marked those who cause division and occasions of stumbling, the faithful child of God is then to “turn away from him.” The KJV says to “avoid them.” When brethren attend workshops and sit at the feet of false teachers, they have not avoided them. If every child of God would practice what is demanded by Paul, the false teachers would not have an audience and their influence would be greatly curtailed.

The next passage for our consideration is **Ephesians 5:11**. Here the apostle Paul instructs us to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them.” In an effort to avoid the implications of this verse, some have suggested that the “unfruitful works of darkness” refers only to immoral practices. We must not forget that eternal principles are often times “clothed” in circumstances. The truth of this passage finds application in other situations wherein the “unfruitful works of darkness” exist. It should be obvious to the student of God’s Word that false teachers are often classified with immoral characters. Jude considered false teachers as the “feathered friends” of unbelievers (v. 5), rebellious angels (v. 6), and homosexuals (v. 7). In 2 Corinthians 6:14, Paul asked a rhetorical question: “What fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness?” The intended answer is **none!** God’s people are “children of light” (1 The. 5:5). We have been “delivered us out of the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love” (Col. 1:13). We have “cast off the works of darkness” (Rom. 13:12). We are instructed to “walk in the light” (1 John 1:6-7). Tommy Hicks wrote:

Some want to contend that it is possible to **refuse to fellowship** the “unfruitful works of darkness” while continuing to fellowship the one(s) producing those works....**THINK!** Is Jesus merely talking about trees and the fruits they produce, or is He using this figure to illustrate the fact that false teachers and others producing the “unfruitful works of darkness” are actually evil?....Herein lies the problem. Can a good tree, a tree of light, produce “unfruitful works of darkness”? **NO!** If a good tree cannot produce “unfruitful works of darkness,” how is it possible for it to be in fellowship with the kind of tree that does? **IT CANNOT!**¹⁴

But before we leave this passage let us notice that Paul had in mind not only the immoral, but the false teacher as well. In verse 6 he clearly said, “Let no man deceive you with empty words.”

Next we turn to **Titus 3:10-11**, which reads: “A factious man after a first and second admonition refuse; knowing that such a one is perverted, and sinneth, being self-condemned.” The KJV says, “A man that is an heretick.” A heretic is a teacher or follower of false doctrine. One who persists in promoting or supporting false doctrine is to be *refused*. A. T. Robertson says *refused* is “present middle imperative of *paraiteo*, meaning to ask from, to beg off from.”¹⁵ The same word was used by Paul in 1 Timothy 4:7, “But refuse profane and old wives’ fables.”

In **2 Thessalonians 3:6** Paul wrote: “Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us.” The passage plainly teaches that faithful Christians are to *withdraw*: avoid, turn away from those who walk *disorderly*. The original suggests one who is not keeping rank, out of step with others. This includes (1) the disorderly, verse 6; (2) those who reject God’s tradition, verse 6; (3) those who are idle, verse 11; (4) those who are busybodies, verse 11; and (5) those who are disobedient, verse 14.

All of these passages teach clearly that there is such a thing as God’s law of exclusion. Other Scriptures could be brought to bear upon this subject, but we believe these are sufficient to show that God intends that we exclude certain ones from our fellowship. We now turn our attention to the circumstances in which that law must be applied.

APPLICATION IN THREE AREAS

Having defined our terms and examined at least a few passages that pertain to the limitations of fellowship, we now turn our attention to some specific application of these truths. Obviously extremes must be avoided. Some see no limits on fellowship whatsoever. In fact, we would be curious where brethren like Max Lucado, Rubel Shelly, and Mike Cope would draw the line of fellowship. Are there any false teachers so bad that these men would refuse to have fellowship with them? At the other end of the spectrum there are those who would exclude anyone who might not agree with them on every single,

minute detail. To these, there is no room for disagreement whatsoever. We must constantly pray for wisdom that we might learn to avoid the extremes. Who, then, is to be excluded from fellowship? Where are the “limits of fellowship”?

First, fellowship must be limited to those who are living a proper moral life. Most would agree that we simply cannot extend fellowship **to those living in sin**, particularly with regard to what we sometimes refer to as gross immoral sin. We readily admit that some of the more extreme, liberal denominations have opened their fellowship to perversion of every sort and shade. The acceptance of homosexuals into church membership, and even the ordination of homosexuals and lesbians, is one example of how far some “religiously sincere” folks will go in the name of tolerance and acceptance. I do not know of any of our brethren that have embraced the profligate and immoral into their fellowship, but with the “open door” policy being adopted by some, it cannot be far away. Paul told Timothy, “Lay hands hastily on no man, neither be partaker of other men’s sins: keep thyself pure” (1 Tim. 5:22). The Greek word *koinonei* is translated “partaker” in this verse. Literally the passage reads, “neither fellowship in sins of others.”

Second, fellowship must be limited to those who conform to the pattern set forth in the New Testament regarding our religious practices. We cannot fellowship those in religious error by participating with them in their religious observances. We are witnessing a number of our brethren participating with the denominations in joint worship services on such occasions as Easter, Christmas, and Thanksgiving. As I write this manuscript, I have before me an article that appeared in the Ada, Oklahoma *Evening News*, dated March 23, 1997. The title of the ad reads, “Community Holy Week Services.” The “theme” for this inter-denominational worship service is, “Lifted Up, Drawn Together.” Speakers include preachers from the First Presbyterian Church, First Freewill Baptist Church, Luke’s Episcopal Church, and the Central Church of Christ. Unfortunately this is not an isolated case. Can we, as members of the one body, participate with those who reject the authority of our Lord, and who go about to set up and promote institutions contrary to the New Testament? We must answer in the negative. To substantiate our position we call your attention to 1 Corinthians 10:14-33. In this passage Paul both *allowed* and *con-*

demned the eating of meats sacrificed to idols. In 10:19 and 23 Paul points out that there is nothing intrinsically evil in meat that had been offered to idols. No sin was involved so long as it was not offensive to the one eating the meat (cf., Rom. 14:23; 1 Cor. 8:7), and so long as it did not cause a brother to stumble (1 Cor. 8:9; 10:23ff). Therefore, in a **social** setting the Christian could eat that meat which had been formerly offered in a pagan worship. To do the same thing in a **religious** setting, however, was explicitly forbidden. Paul wrote:

But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion [*koinownous*, i.e., “fellowship”] with demons. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? with demons. Ye cannot drink of the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons. Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he? (1 Cor. 10:20-22).

It should be noted that the “cup of the Lord” in this passage refers to the worship and sacrifice offered unto God, and the “cup of demons” has to do with false worship of any kind. If not, why not? If our analysis of this passage is correct, and we believe it is, then no Christian can participate in any way in worship that is not strictly according to the teaching of the New Testament. We have a hunch that most, if not all, of those “inter-denominational” worship services similar to that noted above are contrary to the pattern for worship set forth in God’s Word. We also have a hunch that most, if not all, members of the Lord’s church that participate in such “inter-denominational” worship services engage in unscriptural worship practices. Will any dare to deny it, or prove contrariwise? It is this scribe’s conclusion that the child of God cannot participate in, encourage, or in any way lend support to the unauthorized acts of worship characteristic of man made churches.

Third, fellowship **among brethren** is limited to only those who conform to God’s Word in both doctrine and holy living. John clearly stated:

If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the 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 his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

The word *walk* was used frequently by New Testament writers as an idiom for the totality of human conduct. The word is a figure of speech summing up the life and its activities. To walk in darkness is to walk according to the flesh. The Christian walk describes a type of life, the general course being submission to Christ and His will. John here points out that one who claims to walk in the light, and yet does not do so, commits two sins: (1) He fails to walk in the light, and (2) He lies by saying that he is walking in the light. John here enforces a statement by denying the opposite—"we lie, and **do not the truth.**" It should be pointed out that the negative is not a mere equivalent of the positive: the two together mean, "we are false both in word and deed." Truth with John is not confined to language; it is exhibited in conduct also. There are many who **claim** a relationship with God, but who are harboring some sin in their life which negates that fellowship and identifies them as being in the dark. Language cannot be any clearer in expressing the truth that fellowship is limited to those who continue to walk in the light. Any who do not walk in the light cannot enjoy fellowship with those that do.

It should also be pointed out that such limitation of fellowship is **not confined** to the local congregation. Withdrawal from a brother because of his false teaching is brotherhood wide. Brother Wayne Jackson has pointed out:

Though the act of withdrawal is a congregational process that is to be consummated in the public assembly with reference to local matters, it needs also to be recognized that *disfellowship* can be as wide as fellowship, and fellowship certainly can extend beyond the borders of a local congregation. The notion, advanced by some, that a rogue brother may not be chastised beyond the boundary of the local church, without that church's "autonomy" being violated, is theological garbage!¹⁶

It is so much spiritual sophistry that seeks to skate around our brotherhood-wide responsibility with regard to marking and avoiding false teachers in another city or another state. This cessation of fellowship is as far reaching as fellowship, and who would suggest that fellowship is limited to the local congregation alone?

Fellowship cannot be extended to the immoral brother (1 Cor. 5), those who have departed from the faith (1 Tim. 4:1), or teachers of false doctrine (Rom. 16:17). We will confine our comments here to the false teachers. At what point in time does false teaching constitute

grounds for withdrawing fellowship? All error contains within it the capability of destroying the fellowship that exists between Christians. There is in any error that *seed* of disunity that can at any moment disrupt into an overwhelming flood of discontent and disharmony so as to bring about division. We believe it is possible for error to be so held and taught that it causes a breach in the body and ultimately cessation of fellowship.

Some disagreement, however, can exist among believers—even over doctrinal matters—and yet fellowship maintained. Some have preferred to refer to such as “non-fatal” error. I, personally, am not satisfied with such terminology, but until we determine some better way to describe this particular situation, this will have to do. The mode of the indwelling of the Spirit has long been a matter of disagreement among some of the ablest and most staunch defenders of the faith, and that without cessation of fellowship. How, then, do we determine whether or not an erroneous doctrine is “fatal” or “non-fatal”? What constitutes grounds for severance of fellowship when it comes to erroneous doctrine? Let me suggest the following guidelines.

First, consideration must be given to the attitude of the one holding the false doctrine. Is he adamant in his position? Does he manifest a **teachable** disposition? After having been taken aside and taught the way of the Lord more perfectly, does he persist in his error, or is there a willingness to either hold his opinion to himself or does he continue to press the issue? All of these things must be taken into consideration.

Second, what about the doctrine itself? Are there any grave implications that affect the nature of the church, the truth about the Godhead, or the inspiration and/or all-sufficiency of the Word? Does this particular doctrine affect the worship of the church or the moral conduct of the child of God? Brother Dave Miller concluded:

As long as the individual’s error does not lead him into a course of action that violates God’s will, fellowship with him may be maintained while we seek to instruct him. However, one’s erroneous beliefs about many things (e.g., instrumental music, divorce/remarriage, use of alcohol, and even fellowship itself) will often lead to outward action that is sinful (e.g., actually using the instrument or urging others to do so, violating God’s marriage laws, drinking alcohol, and fellowshiping the impenitent). At that point, to remain

faithful to God, His will regarding restoration or ultimate rejection must be implemented.¹⁷

CONCLUSION

God's Word is clear. Fellowship cannot be extended beyond those limitations that God has placed upon us. "If" is a mighty big word, and John used it to define the bounds and limitations of fellowship one with another (1 John 1:7). It is rather unfortunate that once faithful brethren have long since passed those bounds. The late and lamented brother Andrew Conally wrote these words more than a decade ago. They are as applicable today as then, perhaps even more so:

In days like these, many have forgotten that God's word teaches and commands the discipline of heretics, the immoral and all false teachers. Church discipline has been so neglected that our people are abominably ignorant of what God expects. We live in the age of lassitude, neglect, mediocrity and permissiveness. Anarchy instead of order prevails. Toleration and fellowship of any and everything have become the order of the day. Elders have suffered sin to eat like a gangrene into the spiritual life of our congregations. Members have openly and often flaunted plain Bible teaching on marriage, divorce and remarriage. Dancers, drinkers and dividers have been allowed to remain in full fellowship....And now preachers and elders join the ministerial alliances and promote denominational error under the guise of "preaching Christ." Fellowship of those who deny the basic authority of Christ is taught and sought everywhere about us and our members do not have the courage or will to fight it or get out of it. May God help us if such is allowed to continue or remain. Jesus did not come to make men religious, only religiously right!¹⁸

May God help us to recognize and respect the limitations of fellowship that the Almighty has placed upon us. To fail to do so will spell certain ruin for the church.

ENDNOTES

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³Roger Campbell, "Fellowship," *Defender*, Bellview Church of Christ, July 1981, p. 53.

⁴Robert Taylor, *The Bible Doctrine of Christian Fellowship* (Ripley, TN: Taylor Publications, 1980), p. 6.

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¹²N. B. Hardeman, *Hardeman Tabernacle Sermons, V* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1943), pp. 81-82.

¹³Tom Warren, "We Must Honor God's Law of Exclusion," *Spiritual Sword*, January 1974, inside front cover.

¹⁴Tommy Hicks, "Difficult Passages—No. V," *Studies In Ephesians*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1997), p. 513.

¹⁵A. T. Robertson, *Word Pictures In The New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1931), 4:608.

¹⁶Wayne Jackson, "Limitations of Fellowship," *Christian Courier*, September 1983, pp. 18-19.

¹⁷Dave Miller, *Piloting The Strait* (Pulaski, TN: Sain Publications, 1996), p. 294.

¹⁸Andrew Conally, *The Dangers of Liberalism* (Jonesboro, AR: National Christian Press, 1985), p. 52.

WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

Ken Willis



Ken Willis began preaching in 1960 during his freshman year at Freed-Hardeman College. Upon graduation he spent eight years in mission work in the mountains of North Carolina. In 1971, he and his family moved to Singapore to teach at Four Seas College of Bible and Missions while awaiting visas for work in Malaysia. In the fall of 1971, the Willis' moved to Malacca, Malaysia, to pioneer a congregation in that city. In 1974, they began a congregation in Petaling Jaya, Malaysia. In late 1975, the Islamic government of Malaysia refused to grant any further visas. However, the Willis' have returned several times on tourist visas preaching a month each time. For the past three years they have also worked in Bible training schools in India.

In addition to mission work in North Carolina and Asia, Ken preached at Pinellas Park, Florida, Chattanooga, Tennessee, and is currently in his seventh year with the church in Morrison, Tennessee. He has also preached in New Zealand, Fiji, Indonesia, Thailand, Hong Kong, India, and the Bahamas. Ken is married to the former, Clyde Ann Fitzpatrick, and they have two children: Melodee Lynn (Willis) Nash, and Christopher Willis.

INTRODUCTION

The late and lamented Foy Smith has written:

A lack of discipline is responsible for the chaos in which the world now finds itself. Disregard for authority is evident on every hand. Discipline has faded into almost complete obscurity in the affairs of nations, states, communities, and has all but disappeared from the church of God. No home can be strong without discipline. No church can properly function without discipline. No nation can stand if its people flagrantly disregard discipline.¹

A study of “Withdrawal of Fellowship” requires a look at what the Bible teaches regarding church discipline. Withdrawal of fellowship and the practicing of church discipline seems to be, as brother Ed Smithson has written, the “forgotten commandment” in many congregations of the Lord’s church. And indeed, without discipline, chaos will result in homes, communities, the nation, and certainly in the church.

Sadly, about every sin found in the world can also be found in the church today. In many congregations there are those who hold grudges, are guilty of being harsh in judgment, are critical fault-

finders, sowers of discord, factious, gossipers, slanders, tale bearers and backbiters, forsakers of the assembly, foul-mouthed, false teachers, drunkards, and avarice-afflicted adulterers! There is a tendency to wink at sin and excuse it with the excuse that to try to correct it is to meddle into people's private lives. Such things "ought not so to be" (Jam. 3:10). This is not a popular subject. It is neglected, avoided, feared, and ignored. Yet it is a Bible subject that must be studied. It is not optional. Paul wrote:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

This language is strong! It is a command, and therefore must be obeyed.

There are two kinds of church discipline: preventive or instructive and corrective. The church has done a fairly good job in instructive and preventive discipline through the teaching of God's Word, but has miserably failed in the matter of corrective discipline in withdrawing fellowship from those in sin.

GOD DEMANDS DISCIPLINE

God has always disciplined or punished those who sinned. Adam and Eve were punished for their disobedience (Gen. 3:16-19). The antediluvians, in rejecting the preaching of Noah, were punished (Gen. 7:21). Lot's wife experienced the wrath of God in her disobedience (Gen. 19:26) when God was punishing Sodom and Gomorrah for their homosexuality. In their substitution of "strange fire before the LORD, which he commanded them not" (Lev. 10:1), Nadab and Abihu lost their lives. Because of the violation of God's instructions by one man in the battle of Jericho, all Israel suffered the punishment of God (Jos. 7:1-13). Due to Aaron and Miriam speaking against Moses, Miriam was punished with leprosy (Num. 12:1-10). Ananias and Sapphira paid with their lives for lying to God (Acts 5:1-10). The Corinthian Christians were "not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (1 Cor. 5:11).

Discipline of unruly members is not an option, but a command of God!

Now we **command** you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

We are to “have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11). We are instructed not to fellowship unrighteousness, darkness, etc. (2 Cor. 6:14-18). Through discipline we mark those who cause division or walk disorderly (Rom. 16:17). Sin will cause the church to not only lose its battle against Satan, but also prevent it from being presented unto Christ without spot and blemish.

THE PURPOSE OF WITHDRAWAL

One purpose of withdrawal of fellowship is to save the sinner. Hymenaeus and Alexander were delivered unto Satan by Paul “that they may learn not to blaspheme” (1 Tim. 1:19-20). They were being disciplined not to blaspheme. The fornicator in the church at Corinth was to be delivered “unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus” (1 Cor. 5:5). The “flesh” refers to the works of the flesh.

Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are *these*; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like: of the which I tell you before, as I have also told *you* in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God (Gal. 5:19-21).

The Thessalonians were to have no fellowship with the disorderly (2 The. 3:6). One of the main purposes of withdrawal is the salvation of the one involved in sinful living. Albert Barnes wrote:

It is not revenge, hatred, malice, or the mere exercise of the power that is to lead to it; it is the good of the individual that is to be pursued and sought. While the church endeavors to remain pure, its aim and object should be mainly to correct and reform the offender, that his spirit may be saved. When discipline is undertaken from any other motive than this; when it is pursued from private pique, or rivalry, or ambition, or the love of power; when it seeks to overthrow the influence or standing of another, it is wrong. The salvation of the offender and the glory of God should prompt to all the measures which should be taken in the case.²

Another purpose of withdrawal is to warn other members of the church. Failure to purge out sin leads to a toleration of sin and blinds

to its true nature. The Corinthians were “puffed up” regarding one involved in fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-2). Since “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6), it is only by purging out that leaven that the other is kept from contamination. When withdrawal from sinful members takes place, the church can maintain its purity. Likewise, it escapes the condemnation that is sure to come for refusal to do so.

A third purpose of withdrawal is to magnify and exalt the Lord and His church. Every individual and every congregation has the responsibility to “do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). When members are disciplined for sinful living, outsiders will have a greater respect for the church. Discipline in the church at Jerusalem brought “great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things” (Acts 5:11).

A fourth purpose of withdrawal is to teach all that Christians must live upright lives. Paul told Timothy, “Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear” (1 Tim. 5:20).

FROM WHOM SHOULD WE WITHDRAW?

We must withdraw from those who are **immoral** in their conduct. Paul makes this abundantly clear in 1 Cor. 5:11. “But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.” In chapter six Paul states:

Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God (1 Cor. 6:9-10).

This includes those who participate in the works of the flesh (Gal. 5:19-21).

We must withdraw from those who **walk disorderly**.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us (2 The. 3:6).

Those who continue to walk in an insubordinate spirit are disorderly. The word *disorderly* comes from a military term meaning: “They are not keeping order, failing to keep rank, out of one’s place, undisci-

plined.” A disorderly person is a church member that is walking contrary to the truth. Anything one may be doing that is contrary to the teachings of the apostles doctrine is disorderly conduct and makes him a subject for withdrawal. This would include those who are not willing to work (2 The. 3:10), making them worse than an infidel (1 Tim. 5:8). It likewise includes those who are busybodies (2 The. 3:11).

Those who cause **divisions and offenses** are subject to withdrawal. “Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them” (Rom 16:17). They are guilty of corrupting the doctrine of God and failing to abide in it.

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed (2 John 9-10).

Instructing Titus regarding the work of elders, Paul further warned that false teachers must be disciplined (Tit. 1:9-13). He gave similar instruction to Timothy (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

We must withdraw from those who **sin against a brother** in a matter of personal offense and who will **not repent**.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear *thee*, *then* take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, **tell it unto the church** (Mat 18:15-17).

After private settlement fails, and group pleadings fail, the matter is taken to the church. Breaking fellowship is always a last resort. It is like a doctor being forced to amputate a patient's infected limb to save his life. The doctor will try all possible means to save the limb, but when all other treatments fail and the patient is in danger of death, the amputation takes place as a last resort. Bringing a member to repentance without disfellowship is so much better than by withdrawal of fellowship.

WHAT PRECEDES WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP?

Every member of the church is a member of Christ's body and members of one another (1 Cor. 12:12). Thus, every effort should be

made to restore those overtaken in a fault (Gal. 6:1). This is done in gentleness with great care. Visits, prayers, public, and private teaching are done in an effort to regain and restore the overtaken one. Their spirit of meekness and self-examination will do much to impress the wayward one of the church's real love for him.

Withdrawal of fellowship can be avoided by restoring the erring brother.

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

Since the value of one erring soul is worth more than all the world (Mat. 16:26), we should strive to save it from hell with great urgency.

PROCEDURE FOR WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP

In all steps, the church must act together. First, there is to be public and private teaching about the seriousness of sin. There must be teaching about the meaning and purpose of withdrawal. The certainty of the guilt or innocence of the accused must be determined. Second, the disobedient must be warned and impressed about the seriousness of the sin (1 The. 5:14). Elders/leaders should plead with the guilty one to repent (Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:19). When that fails, his/her name is put before the church for all to pray and work for the erring one's repentance (Jam. 5:16). Third, the disorderly is publicly warned that if he/she does not repent within a reasonable time, withdrawal of fellowship will be necessary. Fourth, once these efforts have failed, the church should withdraw fellowship and make that action public (1 Cor. 5:4). An announcement should be made to the congregation. It is good to write a letter to the withdrawn, citing the Scriptures as a reminder of why the church has withdrawn from him. The person is then considered outside the fellowship of the church.

ATTITUDE TOWARD THE WITHDRAWN

One, we must "note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother" (2 The. 3:14-15). To have no company with him means to refuse to eat a common meal with him or do anything that might suggest approval of his life.

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or

a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Cor. 5:11).

While they must be avoided (Rom. 16:17), they must still be admonished as erring brethren. Kindness and firmness must be shown by every member. He must always know that the church desires and prays for his repentance.

OBJECTIONS TO WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

Some object simply because they are ignorant of what God says on the subject of church discipline. The congregation has not been taught either in the classroom or by pulpit preaching. Others have a lack of faith in God's plan. Yet God has promised:

For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts. For as the rain cometh down, and the snow from heaven, and returneth not thither, but watereth the earth, and maketh it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater: So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it (Isa 55:9-11).

Others offer the objection that in the parable of the tares the wheat and tares were allowed to grow together. They erroneously conclude, therefore, that God will do the uprooting of sinners at the harvest time. If such were the case, this would be a violation of other plain and obvious teaching. Another objection is that the individual has withdrawn from the church; thus no further action is required. However, Galatians 6:1 indicates that a responsibility still exists to try to restore that one. Others may simply not have the moral courage to stand for the Lord's will (Eph. 6:10). Perhaps others are afraid that their lives are not what they ought to be; so who are they to judge another. Still others simply do not want to get involved.

CONCLUSION

Christ purchased the church with His blood. It is going to be presented to him a "glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Eph. 5:27). Such being true, and knowing that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump, we must put away those unrepentant members who are involved in sin. We must help maintain the purity of the beautiful bride of Christ. Souls are in the balance: (1) our's in either being true

to God or flagrantly disregarding His will, (2) others who are involved in sin, but who need to be restored. Judgment is certain. Heaven or hell awaits!

MATERIALS FOR FURTHER STUDY

¹James Meadows, *Withdraw Yourselves—A Study In Church Discipline* (Montgomery, AL: Bible & School Supply).

²James Pilgrim, *Withdrawing From The Disorderly*, tract (Memphis, TN: Con-tending For The Faith).

ENDNOTES

¹Ed Smithson, *The Forgotten Commandment* (Nashville, TN: The Christian Teacher, Inc., 1976), p. i.

²Albert Barnes, *Notes On The New Testament, 1 Corinthians* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1953), p. 93.

HOW TO TREAT THE WITHDRAWN

Michael Hatcher



Michael Hatcher was born in Pensacola, Florida, the son of a gospel preacher. He is married to Karen (Savage), and they have two sons. He has done local work in Texas, Oklahoma, and Arkansas, and is presently working with the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola, Florida. He has spoken on several lectureships, gospel meetings, to youth groups, and has done radio and television work. He also taught in Texomaland School of Biblical Studies in Denison, Texas, and was the educational director at State Street Church of Christ in Bristol, Virginia.

Michael directed the North Texas Lectureship and currently is director of the Bellview Lectures. He has written articles for several brotherhood publications and a weekly newspaper (from 1987 - 1994) and is on the advisory staff of *Firm Foundation*. He was the associate editor of the *Shield Of Faith* and now is editor of *Defender*, the *Beacon*, and the Bellview Lectures book. He is co-author of a book, *Hatcher/Schweitzer Exchange*, an exchange of letters with a Lutheran minister on the subject of Total Hereditary Depravity and other subjects, and a debate on the subject of instrumental music in worship with Baptist, Bob L. Ross.

INTRODUCTION

When most of us hear the word *discipline*, we think of someone being corrected. However, corrective discipline is only one aspect of a broader category, which also includes the entirety of training, teaching, and correction. Discipline in all its forms is essential to success. Any organization which lacks it will soon lose direction and probably fail. Even sports teams with outstanding players, if they lack discipline, loose to teams with inferior talent.

Within the Lord's church, discipline is woefully lacking. Many congregations do not have any idea of a total teaching and training program. The result is seen in that many members do not have any knowledge of the scriptural nature of the church and why we practice what we do. Additionally, there is no corrective church discipline in most congregations, which is the reason many have erroneously referred to withdrawal of fellowship as the forgotten command. It has not been forgotten—simply ignored, even though there are many individuals through the years that should have been withdrawn from.

FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship with others resides in our fellowship with God. When one person has fellowship with God and I have fellowship with God, then we have fellowship with each other.

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. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 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 (1 John 1:3-7).

This fellowship with God, and others, is based upon God's Word and our obedience to it. In Jesus' great High Priestly prayer, recorded in John 17, in which He prays for unity, He first prays for Himself. He then prays for His apostles as He sends them out with the Word which the Father had given Him. He then prays for all believers and their unity (fellowship).

Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through **their word**; That they all may be one; as thou, Father, *art* in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me (John 17:20-21).

We are to be one with the Father and Son through the apostles' Word which they received from Christ (John 17:8, 17-18).

Paul teaches that we are to be perfectly joined together and have no divisions.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Later he informs us how we will have the same mind thus having unity.

And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think *of men* above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another (1 Cor. 4:6).

The same speech will be God's Word: "If any man speak, *let him speak* as the oracles of God" (1 Pet. 4:11a). Thus to have unity or fellowship with others will be based upon what is written—the Bible.

John discusses this fellowship and shows that it is based upon the Scriptures. "Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son" (2 John 9). The doctrine of Christ has reference to the teaching of the New Testament. When one remains in the teaching (doctrine) of the New Testament and does not go beyond what is written, then he has fellowship with God.

The unity of the Spirit (Eph. 4:1-7) will remain between God and man when we remain within the seven ones. While there are some who are trying to redefine one or more of the seven ones listed by the Spirit, nevertheless properly defined, the one faith (Eph. 4:5) embraces the whole of the New Testament. Thus, our fellowship with God is based upon our keeping the New Testament doctrine. When one person has fellowship with God and another person has fellowship with God, the result will be that they have fellowship with each other.

The Scriptures also teach that we are to withdraw fellowship from individuals who fall within certain categories. When one commits a personal offense against another, Jesus gives specific instructions concerning the reconciliation of these brethren. The offended is to go to the offender and try to restore him. If he refuses, the offended is to take one or two witnesses with him. If the offender still refuses to repent, they are to tell it to the church and bring the influence of the entire church upon him to try to get him to repent. If he still is unrepentant, the church is to withdraw from him (Mat. 18:15-20).

The church also has the responsibility to withdraw fellowship from those who live immoral lives. In Corinth there was a man committing fornication—living with his father's wife (probably his step-mother). Paul informs them to withdraw their fellowship from this immoral individual. He then adds other immoral acts which the church cannot fellowship.

But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat (1 Cor. 5:11).

Ephesians 5:11 simply states that we are not to have fellowship with the “unfruitful works of darkness.” In warning of the perilous times that were coming, Paul writes:

For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such **turn away** (2 Tim. 3:2-5).

When a person is factious (causing division), the church is obligated to withdraw fellowship from him. Paul writes, “A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject” (Tit. 3:10). *Heretick* is translated “factious man” in the ASV and “primarily denotes capable of choosing; hence, causing division by a party spirit, factious.”¹ He informs the Romans:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple (Rom.16:17-18).

When a person begins teaching doctrinal error (such error as would cause one to lose his soul), the church is obligated to withdraw from him. Paul told Timothy, “As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). Later in the chapter Paul shows Timothy what to do with false teachers:

Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck: Of whom is Hymenaeus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme (1 Tim. 1:19-20).

Later in the book Paul adds:

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Elders have the obligation to stop the mouths of those who teach false doctrines.

Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers. For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision: whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake (Tit. 1:9-11).

Anytime a person no longer walks according to God's Word and will not repent, he is subject to withdrawal. Paul writes:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us....And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed (2 The. 3:6, 14).

John writes about our fellowship with each other and shows it is dependent upon our fellowship with God. Only as we remain in fellowship with God do we continue in fellowship with each other. "If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). It would then be our duty to withdraw our fellowship from the one walking in darkness (sin).

When the church must withdraw fellowship from a wayward brother, the question arises as to how the church is to treat the brother who has had fellowship withdrawn. That is the subject of this lesson. To properly answer this question we must first consider a few passages of Scripture.

EXAMINATION OF PASSAGES

Any consideration of this subject would certainly be incomplete without a study of the longest passage in the New Testament dealing with withdrawal of fellowship: 1 Corinthians 5. There are seven phrases in this chapter that deal specifically with how we are to treat the withdrawn brother.

It is reported commonly *that there is* fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, *concerning* him that hath so done this deed, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the

whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened *bread* of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person (1 Cor. 5).

Notice the seven phrases: “might be taken away from among you....to deliver such an one unto Satan...purge out...not to company with...not to keep company...no not to eat....put away from among yourselves” (1 Cor. 5:2, 5, 7, 9, 11, 13). As we look at these verses, it will be important for us to study the words used by inspiration to get a full understanding of God’s intention for us regarding how we treat those from whom we withdraw. (Note: All definitions in this section will be taken from *Strong’s Enhanced Lexicon*.) “Taken away” in verse 2 is from the Greek *exairo* meaning: “(1) to lift up or take away out of a place 2) to remove.”² There are some manuscripts that have the Greek *airo* meaning “to lift, carry, take up or away, or to bear away what has been raised, carry off.”

In verse 7 Paul commands us to “purge out” sin. This is an imperative (which is the mood of command and denotes a command requiring full obedience of the hearers) of *ekkathairo* meaning, “to cleanse out, clean thoroughly, to cleanse.” Next, in verse 9, we are told “not to company with,” and again in verse 11 we are informed, “not to keep company.” Both of these come from the same Greek word *sunanamignumi* meaning: “(1) to mix up together 2) to keep company with, be intimate with one.” Also in verse 11 we are commanded “not to eat” with a brother who is living an immoral life. This word is *sunesthio* meaning “to eat with, take food together with.” Last in verse 13 we are told to “put away” the wicked person. This is the same root word as “take away” in verse 2 but simply a different verbal form. Now, let us deal with the other passages concerning this subject in order of their appearance.

Jesus tells us how to deal with settling personal offenses in Matthew 18:15-20. He sets forth three steps to take: (1) going to the offender personally, (2) taking one or two witnesses, (3) telling it to the church. He says, "And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell *it* unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Mat. 18:17). The man who refuses to repent of a personal sin against another is to be treated as a Gentile and a tax-collector.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). There are two words we must consider. "Mark" is from the Greek *skopeo* which means: "1) to look at, observe, contemplate 2) to mark 3) to fix one's eyes upon, direct one's attention to, any one 4) to look to, take heed to thyself." When comparing this word with the Greek *blepo*, *Strong's* notes that this word is more pointed than *blepo*:

often meaning "to scrutinize, observe". When the physical sense recedes, "to fix one's (mind's) eye on, direct one's attention to" a thing in order to get it, or owing to interest in it, or a duty towards it. Hence often the same as "to aim at, care for etc."

Not only are we to "mark them," we are also told to "avoid them." This is an imperative of *ekklino*. This word is from the word *klino* meaning "to bend" and *ek* meaning "out of" or "out from within." *Strong's* says: "1) to turn aside, deviate (from the right way and course); 2) to turn (one's self) away, to turn away from, keep aloof from one's society; 3) to shun one."

Paul writes to the Ephesian brethren: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). "Fellowship" is from the Greek *sugkoinoneo* and means "to become a partaker together with others, or to have fellowship with a thing." The Christian is not only to have no fellowship; they are also to "reprove them." This is from the Greek *elegcho* meaning:

1) to convict, refute, confute; 1a) generally with a suggestion of shame of the person convicted; 1b) by conviction to bring to the light, to expose; 2) to find fault with, correct; 2a) by word; 2a1) to reprehend severely, chide, admonish, reprove; 2a2) to call to account, show one his fault, demand an explanation; 2b) by deed; 2b1) to chasten, to punish.

Both of the words used here are imperatives.

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us....And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother (2 The. 3:6, 14-15).

In verse 6 we are told to withdraw from those who are not walking according to the Scriptures. “Withdraw” is from the Greek *stello* meaning:

1) to set, place, set in order, arrange; 1a) to fit out, to prepare, equip; 1b) to prepare one’s self, to fit out for one’s self; 1c) to fit out for one’s own use; 1d) to prepare one’s self, to fit out for one’s self; 1e) to fit out for one’s own use; 1e1) arranging, providing for this, etc.; 2) to bring together, contract, shorten; 2a) to diminish, check, cause to cease; 2b) to cease to exist; 2c) to remove one’s self, withdraw one’s self, to depart; 2d) to abstain from familiar intercourse with one.

The context shows that the last two meanings would be under consideration here. Verse 14 informs us that we have the obligation to note the man and have no company with him. “Note” is an imperative of *semeioo*, meaning “to mark, to note, distinguish by marking.” “Company” is from the same Greek word as is found in 1 Corinthians 5:9 and 11, *sunanamignumi*. Paul then adds that we are not to *count*, consider or think, of this wayward brother as an *enemy*. This is from the Greek *echthros* meaning: “hated, odious, hateful; hostile, hating, and opposing another.” Instead of thinking of this one as one hated, we are to *admonish* him. This is an imperative from the Greek *noutheteo* meaning: “to admonish, warn, exhort.”

If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself (1 Tim. 6:3-5).

Christians are to withdraw from those who would teach false doctrines. “Withdraw” is an imperative of *aphistemi* meaning:

1) to make stand off, cause to withdraw, to remove; 1a) to excite to revolt; 2) to stand off, to stand aloof; 2a) to go away, to depart from anyone; 2b) to desert, withdraw from one; 2c) to fall away, become faithless; 2d) to shun, flee from; 2e) to cease, to vex one; 2f) to

withdraw one's self from, to fall away; 2g) to keep one's self from, absent one's self from.

In Paul's second letter to Timothy he describes the perilous times that are coming and then informs Timothy that those who live in such a way have "a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away" (2 Tim. 3:5). "Turn away" is an imperative of *apotrepo* meaning "to turn one's self away from; to shun, avoid."

In writing to Titus, Paul says, "A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Tit. 3:10-11). A heretick is one who causes divisions or factions because of false doctrines. Paul tells us to admonish or exhort him one time, then exhort him again. If he is still factious after the second admonition then we are to reject him. "Reject" is an imperative of *paraiteomai* which means to ask alongside, to ask for, or supplicate; thus to shun, avoid, refuse, dismiss, or drive out.

John writes to the elect lady and her children that

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

If an individual is not content to remain with the "doctrine of Christ" (the teaching of which He is the author), then that person no longer has fellowship with God (either the Father or the Son). Since he does not have fellowship with God, it stands to reason that we must not have fellowship with him. In not having fellowship with the one who will not remain within Christ's doctrine, we are not to receive him and not to bid him God speed lest we partake of his sin. "Receive" is from the Greek *lambano* which means "to take or to receive, to associate one's self as a companion." We are not to take or receive that person into our home. Also, we must not bid him God speed. "God speed" is from the Greek *chairō* and means "to rejoice, be glad; to rejoice exceedingly; to be well, thrive; in salutations, hail!; at the beginning of letters: to give one greeting, salute." To do either is to make us a partaker of his evil. *Partaker* is the word elsewhere translated "fellowship" (Greek *koinoneō*).

The last verse we should consider says, “And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4). Christians must “come out” from those who commit sin. This is an imperative form of *exerchomai* meaning:

1) to go or come forth of; with mention of the place out of which one goes, or the point from which he departs; of those who leave a place of their own accord; of those who are expelled or cast out 2) metaph., to go out of an assembly, i.e. forsake it; to come forth from physically, arise from, to be born of; to go forth from one’s power, escape from it in safety; to come forth (from privacy) into the world, before the public, (of those who by novelty of opinion attract attention); of things; of reports, rumours, messages, precepts; to be made known, declared; to be spread, to be proclaimed; to come forth, emitted as from the heart or the mouth, to flow forth from the body, to emanate, issue, used of a sudden flash of lightning, used of a thing vanishing, used of a hope which has disappeared.

Then we are not to partake in their sins. Partake is the same word “fellowship with” in Ephesians 5:11 (*sugkoinoneo*).

APPLICATION

I realize that the preceding might have been a little tedious, however, I wanted us to get a full picture of the New Testament teaching. After considering these, it is not difficult to answer how we are to treat the withdrawn. Basically we are to separate ourselves from them. However, is this not the essence of spirituality?

When God created man, He placed man in a beautiful garden where they lived in perfect harmony with God, in fellowship with Him. However, our God is a holy God: free of any and all sin. As such, He cannot associate with sin. “*Thou art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on iniquity*” (Hab. 1:13). Thus, when Adam and Eve sinned, that fellowship with God was broken and man died (Gen. 2:17); Adam and Eve were cast out of the garden. From the beginning of time, God and sin cannot co-exist, thus God separates Himself from it, and expects His people to separate themselves from it.

God chooses Israel as that nation through whom He will bring His Son. As such, Israel was to be holy to God, as He was holy.

Speak unto all the congregation of the children of Israel, and say unto them, Ye shall be holy: for I the LORD your God *am* holy....Sanctify

yourselves therefore, and be ye holy: for I *am* the LORD your God (Lev. 19:2; 20:7).

God gave them His law (the Law of Moses), sacrifices, and offerings so man could be holy.

Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine: And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These *are* the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel (Exo. 19:5-6).

God, to keep Israel holy, separated them from other nations.

But I have said unto you, Ye shall inherit their land, and I will give it unto you to possess it, a land that floweth with milk and honey: I *am* the LORD your God, which have separated you from *other* people....And ye shall be holy unto me: for I the LORD *am* holy, and have severed you from *other* people, that ye should be mine (Lev. 20:24, 26).

In separating Israel from other nations and peoples, God gave them the land of Canaan and drove out the nations then possessing the land. “Every place whereon the soles of your feet shall tread shall be yours: from the wilderness and Lebanon, from the river, the river Euphrates, even unto the uttermost sea shall your coast be” (Deu. 11:24).

And the LORD said unto Moses, Depart, *and* go up hence, thou and the people which thou hast brought up out of the land of Egypt, unto the land which I swore unto Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, Unto thy seed will I give it: And I will send an angel before thee; and I will drive out the Canaanite, the Amorite, and the Hittite, and the Perizzite, the Hivite, and the Jebusite (Exo. 33:1-2).

“And the LORD your God, he shall expel them from before you, and drive them from out of your sight; and ye shall possess their land, as the LORD your God hath promised unto you” (Jos. 23:5). By driving out the nations then possessing the land, God was making sure that Israel would not be contaminated by their wickedness. God was, at the same time, taking vengeance upon those nations for their wickedness—again because He cannot tolerate evil.

Israel failed to drive out the nations as God commanded them. They were then influenced by those nations and their sin causing Israel to sin. This eventually led to God sending the Israelites into captivity.

Therefore it shall come to pass, *that* as all good things are come upon you, which the LORD your God promised you; so shall the LORD

bring upon you all evil things, until he have destroyed you from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you. When ye have transgressed the covenant of the LORD your God, which he commanded you, and have gone and served other gods, and bowed yourselves to them; then shall the anger of the LORD be kindled against you, and ye shall perish quickly from off the good land which he hath given unto you (Jos. 23:15-16).

God is holy and cannot associate with sin, and God expects His people to do the same.

Christianity today is the same. We are in the world but we are not of the world. "I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil. They are not of the world, even as I am not of the world" (John 17:15-16). "If ye were of the world, the world would love his own: but because ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, therefore the world hateth you" (John 15:9). Notice the Christian's relationship with the world. "And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what *is* that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God" (Rom. 12:2). "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (Jam. 4:4). "Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (1 John 2:15). Since we are not of the world, God has called us to separate ourselves from those of the world.

Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

When a Christian returns to the things of the world, thereby leaving Christ; then we must withdraw our fellowship from that individual. We separate ourselves from that brother who refuses to repent. That separation entails an avoiding of the individual so we have no company with him. We are rejecting him, purging him out, showing everyone that his lifestyle is not acceptable. We must not do anything

that in any way might show that we approve of or fellowship him spiritually. This avoidance, having no company, etc., extends to eating a common meal with him, which is specifically forbidden by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:11. This shows us that even social settings have spiritual overtones, and in those social settings we cannot do things that might indicate fellowship with the withdrawn brother. In these social settings it might even extend to the refusing to shake hands with him.

And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship; that we *should go* unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision (Gal. 2:9).

Thus, if we are in a situation where shaking hands with someone from whom fellowship has been withdrawn would indicate approval of that person, we must refuse to shake hands.

While we withdraw ourselves from the withdrawn, we are to continue to admonish him as a brother. Our association with him is our trying to win him back to Christ. “Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted” (Gal. 6:1).

Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins (Jam. 5:19-20).

There are extremes on both sides dealing with the way we treat this erring brother. One extreme treats the withdrawn as a hated enemy. This ignores our responsibility to try and restore the unfaithful and violates the whole of the Christian’s attitude. We must remember that this is a precious soul for whom Christ died. Our withdrawal of fellowship is to shock the person into realizing his lost condition, make him realize what he has lost, and repent. Treating him in this way hinders the purpose of withdrawal.

The other extreme is that some refuse to withdraw from the person. Instead of withdrawing, some will intentionally reject the withdrawal and give comfort to the withdrawn. Almost invariably, when a congregation must take the step of withdrawal, some misguided soul will immediately take the withdrawn out to eat, making themselves subject to withdrawal for walking disorderly (2 The. 3:6).

PROBLEM AREAS

Family

It is especially difficult when a congregation must withdraw fellowship from a family member. It is especially difficult to know and understand how we are to treat this family member. On the one hand, we have family responsibilities (see below); on the other hand we must realize the purpose of withdrawing fellowship—saving the soul. Family members may have the greatest effect in restoring the withdrawn; they must determine in what ways their “fellowship” should be restricted.

In this type of relationship, we must remember that God gives us certain family responsibilities. Faithfulness to God demands that we fulfill those obligations to our families. Husband and wife are still married. The husband must still fulfill his role within the home even if the church has withdrawn from his wife. The wife still must fulfill her role within the home, including being in submission to her husband, even if the church has withdrawn from her husband. Parents have the same responsibilities to their children and children to their parents even when one has been withdrawn from. However, realizing we must fulfill these responsibilities, we must still make it clear to the withdrawn that we do not approve of what he has done nor have spiritual fellowship with him.

Congregational

When one congregation withdraws from someone, what are other congregations to do? (This would also include one congregation withdrawing fellowship from another congregation.) What would a third congregation’s response be to the congregation withdrawn from? If the withdrawal is according to the Scriptures, then the response should be the same for everyone. This person (or congregation) has done something that is worthy of withdrawal of fellowship. If it is worthy of withdrawal of fellowship from one congregation, it is worthy of withdrawal from all congregations.

If we would practice recognizing other’s withdrawal, it would solve a lot of problems and help people get to heaven. A person withdrawn from at one congregation could not run over to another congregation and be accepted into their fellowship and live as if

nothing is wrong in their life. This gives them a false sense of security and hinders their repentance and restoration to God.

CONCLUSION

Let us as the people of God begin practicing the discipline God expects in the total training of Christians. When corrective discipline is needed, let us do what God has commanded. Then let us treat them in the way God instructs, remembering that the purpose of this action is the salvation of souls.

ENDNOTES:

¹Vine, W. E., *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Fleming H. Revell, 1981), [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

²*Enhanced Strong's Lexicon*, (Oak Harbor, WA: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1995), [Online] Available: Logos Library System.

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FELLOWSHIP AND ERROR

David P. Brown



David Brown was born in 1946 in Camden, Arkansas. He is married to the former Joann Anglin of Jackson, Tennessee. They have four children: Timothy, Carrie, Rebekah, and Joanna, and three grandchildren.

He holds the B.A. and M.Ed. degrees from Northeastern Oklahoma State University and has completed course work toward the Ed.D. at Oklahoma State University.

David has been preaching for thirty-three years and is active in Gospel meeting work and lectureships in and out of the United States. He has written for several religious journals and for seven years served as Associate Editor for the *Christian*

Worker and now serves as associate editor for *Contending For The Faith*.

He has served as Assistant Director of Turley Children's Home in Tulsa, Oklahoma, and Director of the Southwest School of Bible Studies in Austin, Texas. He presently works with the Spring Church of Christ in Houston, Texas, is founding director of the Houston College of Bible, and now serves as the preacher and director of the Houston College of the Bible Lectureship.

INTRODUCTION

In considering the totality of the truth concerning unity and division among God's people we learn that there is a unity or fellowship that is acceptable (authorized in the New Testament). However, there is a unity or fellowship that is anathema with God (not authorized in the New Testament). The same is true regarding division. If we do not know how to rightly divide the Word of Truth, we cannot know which fellowship or division is wrong (not authorized) and which ones are right (authorized) (John 17:17-21; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 1:10-13; 2 The. 2:5-16; Rev. 2:2, 14-15, 20). Hence, God has a law of inclusion and a law of exclusion. We must learn them and abide by them. If we do not, we could be found in fellowship with those who are out of fellowship with God and out of fellowship with those who are in fellowship with Him.

God's Law of Inclusion

God's law of inclusion is found in the plan of salvation. That plan is derived from a study of the totality of the New Testament's teaching regarding how and when one is saved by God from his sins. From

the evidence that is contained in the Word of Truth one is led to faith in Christ (Rom. 10:17). The believer in Christ is next instructed to repent of his sins (Acts 17:30). Having repented of his sins the penitent believer is now authorized to confess his faith in Christ (Rom. 10:10). The next step is baptism. It is the final step one takes to become a Christian (Acts 2:38, 41, 47; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21). This is the definitive obedient step. This is the case because it is the step whereby one comes into fellowship with God and all others who have been scripturally baptized into Christ in order to obtain the forgiveness of sins (Mat. 28:18-19; Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; Rom. 6:3-4, 17-18; Col. 2:12; Gal. 3:26-27; Heb. 5:9). As members of the Lord's church to which He adds all whom He saves (Acts 2:47), we cannot remain faithful to the Lord and not honor His law of inclusion. Thereby and only thereby are men brought into fellowship with God.

The Lord's church (God's family) is not allowed (not authorized by Christ in the New Testament) to fellowship or be united with those who refuse to submit to God's law of inclusion. Hence, fellowship with God precedes fellowship with man. Those out of fellowship with God may not be fellowshiped by those who are in fellowship with Him. Today, the New Testament distinction between the Lord's one true church and human religions, especially the denominations, is being set aside by those who have no or very little respect for Bible authority. However, it continues to be the case that Christians are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness" (Eph. 5:11).

God's Law of Exclusion

When the doctrines and/or practices (violation of obligatory matters) of a member of the Lord's church endanger his or her soul and/or unscripturally endanger the souls of other members, then he or she is a scriptural subject for proper corrective discipline as taught in the New Testament. If after such discipline has been applied correctly, and the unruly member refuses to repent, then he or she must be excluded from the fellowship of all faithful children of God (Mat. 18:15-17; Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Cor. 5:2-13; Eph. 5:6, 11-12; 2 The. 3:6-15; Tit. 3:10-11; 2 John 9-11). Those who are in fellowship with God (faithful members of the church of Christ) may not remain faithful to God and all other faithful members of the Lord's church and not faithfully practice God's law of exclusion. With these two

important laws of God in mind let us continue our study of fellowship and error.

No faithful child of God desires to be in error on anything, certainly in matters religious. The tremendous emphasis in the Scriptures on the obligation of one to be right with God, as the rightly divided Word of Truth defines the right, permeates the very fiber of a Christian's being (John 8:31-32; 12:48; 1 The. 5:21; 2 John 8-11). Yet, in reality, most of us are wrong on at least some things, including some things in the religious realm—yes, even biblical matters. But, if we go through death's door having violated even one biblically obligatory matter for which we have not received forgiveness, we will be sentenced to hell when we stand before the judgment seat of Christ (John 12:48; Acts 2:42; Rom. 14:10; Col. 3:17; 1 John 1:7-8; 2 John 8-11). Thus, a part of rightly dividing the Word of Truth is knowing how to recognize the difference in obligatory matters and non-obligatory matters in the authoritative Word of God (2 Tim. 2:15).

It seems that too few brethren, (certain preachers and elders may be included in this category) have no concept of this aspect of ascertaining Bible authority. Hence, fellowship is broken between brethren when such should not be the case (over non-obligatory, non-fatal error). On the other hand, due to a complete lack of respect for any kind of Bible authority other brethren seek to fellowship anyone that can say that Jesus is his Savior. Hence, they are willing to extend to and remain in fellowship with persons who are in violation of obligatory matters set out in the Word of God. Neither position is authorized by the Bible. Each position, therefore, is a violation of at least one obligatory matter and, therefore, constitutes fatal error. One position makes obligatory what God does not, and the other position looses men from what God obligates them to do.

The following account is an example of this ignorance mentioned in the previous paragraph. I was exposed recently to some preachers who were pronouncing certain other brethren to be false teachers. (Incidentally for those who may be prone to draw unwarranted conclusions, the subject under consideration had nothing to do with the Holy Spirit.) When they were asked if these persons whom they had labeled as false teachers were going to hell because of their teaching, these particular preachers just could not bring themselves to declare

that those whom they had labeled to be false teachers were going to hell because of their alleged error.

May it be well understood at this early stage in this chapter that any one who is a false teacher according the New Testament definition of a false teacher (one guilty of omission or commission regarding obligatory matters in the New Testament—fatal error) is headed as straight to hell as is Satan himself. To therefore affirm that someone is a false teacher is to imply that such a person is hell-bound. If such previously mentioned preachers had a correct understanding (assuming that they are not cowards at heart) of that which is obligatory and that which is optional as well as how to tell the difference between the two, they would understand what fatal and non-fatal error is. This is especially interesting when one of these preachers (one of the younger ones) exposed his ignorance by confessing that he had never heard of such a term as “fatal error.” Moreover, these aforementioned fellows and others of their kin should know that one is not authorized by the New Testament to call a person a false teacher unless that person is teaching a doctrine that will cause him and others who believe it to go to hell. Moreover, they should be able to **prove** it (1 The. 5:21). It has been my experience that most of these fellows have not the slightest idea of what is involved in proving their charges. Again, this evidences a woeful lack of knowledge on the part of one whose principle business is to direct persons to and in the pathways of righteousness.

It is, therefore, my goal of this chapter to set out the biblical principles that allow for one to determine in the Word of God what is obligatory and what is not, as well as what is optional and what is not. A doctrine that causes one to omit an obligation to God pertaining to becoming a Christian or living the Christian life is a doctrine that is “fatal error.” It is identified as “fatal error” because its belief and practice stop one (by omission or commission) from doing **only** what God has authorized and **all** that He has obligated him to do.

“Unity in Diversity”

Liberals (those who teach doctrines that loose men from what God in the Bible has bound—obligatory matters—on them) see the various and sundry errors extant in the body of Christ. They make little or no distinction between errors regarding obligatory or non-obligatory matters. They falsely conclude that since errors exist in the church,

we are in error when we expose the errors of the brethren. Of course, such persons do not desire for the errors of our religious neighbors to be exposed either. Hence, in matters of obligation to God (which matters they know not how to determine and in some cases they do not care enough about God's authority to see the need of determining it) they declare the erroneous doctrine of "unity in diversity." This they do without any consideration for the difference between obligatory or non-obligatory matters. "Unity in diversity" simply defined is a doctrine that teaches that men may believe contrary to each other regarding obligatory matters, yet remain in fellowship with God and one another.

Such persons as previously mentioned seek to find grounds for unity and fellowship with God and one another on some basis other than the standard that requires discharging one's obligations to God, which obligations are located only in God's Word. Hence, according to their twisted logic, law becomes antagonistic to grace and love. In this false scheme, love ceases to motivate one to obey God's Word. It becomes an emotional subjective feeling that allows for everything but obedience to God's Word to be saved. Having thereby rejected any association of grace and law, they teach that God's grace is extended to man without law. Therefore, it is alleged by these persons that no one can know who is saved or not saved, except God Himself. Hence, for them there is no law of inclusion or exclusion. However, the Bible teaches that God's love caused God to shed His grace (His favor that no sinner deserves or can merit) on man and that God's grace is extended to man through His commandments (Psa. 119:172; Rom. 5:21; Tit. 2:10-12). Therefore, the gospel of Christ is God's saving power (Mark 16:15; Rom. 1:16; 1 Cor. 15:1-4). Thus, those who refuse to discharge their obligations to God regarding becoming a Christian (God's law of inclusion) will be sentenced to hell on the day of Judgment (2 The. 1:8; Rom. 6:17-18; Heb. 5:9).

Furthermore, to the persons noted in the last paragraph, the Bible becomes a meaningless book as far as it being an instruction book in righteous living. Some of these fellows have gone so far as to label the Bible a "love letter," though the Bible declares that it is an instruction book in righteousness (2 Tim. 2:15; 3:16-17; Jam. 1:25; John 12:48). Moreover, Jesus said, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Therefore, any concept of love that does not

require a person to discharge his obligations to God as they are set out in God's Word is a false concept of love. With no absolute objective standard of conduct, such characters tolerate anyone practicing just about anything. However, they do not tolerate those of us who direct them to the Law of God and obedience to the same (Isa. 8:20; John 14:15; Heb. 5:10).

In the warped thinking of the previously mentioned persons, law becomes a bad word. They are, therefore, moved to seek another standard for unity and fellowship other than the absolute objective standard that is the rightly divided Word of God (2 Tim. 3:16-17). Because such persons are unlearned in how to ascertain Bible authority (whether it is willful ignorance or otherwise) they have nothing but their own opinions (their own subjective likes, dislikes, whims, notions, and feelings) to rely on in determining what they will and will not embrace in matters religious.

These *losers* teach doctrines that cut the whole church loose from all her New Testament identifying marks. Thereby, the church, in time, ceases any and all relationship to the church that Jesus built (Mat. 16:18), that He purchased with His own blood (Acts 20:28), to which Christ adds all the saved (Acts 2:47), and is revealed in her fullness only on the pages of the New Testament. Simply stated, such persons cause the church to go into oblivion. Examples of liberalism's product are the humanly devised Independent Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ.

Of course, this is also the case with those who bind on men what God in His Word has not bound. They, too, are determined to make their likes and dislikes into God's Law. These *binders* usually do their binding, where God has not bound, on a few doctrinal points. By their human legislation they prohibit the church from being and doing all that God meant her to be able to do. Simply stated, such persons choke the church down. Those who are "anti" (against)—orphan homes, cooperation between churches, helping non-saints out of the church treasury, kitchens in the church buildings, multiple containers for the fruit of the vine in the Lord's Supper, "located preachers," Bible classes, and women teachers are examples of optional views that have been pressed to the division of the church.

"The losers" and "the binders," as herein defined, are anathema with God. Such is the case because each view is not content to keep

and uphold only what the Word of God obligates one to do (Col. 3:17). Thereby, the one gospel (God's only power to save man from sin) is altered, and "another gospel," a gospel of a different kind, is preached and practiced regarding God's laws of inclusion and exclusion to the destruction of the proclaimer and hearer alike (Rom. 1:16; Gal. 1:6-9).

Fatal and Non-Fatal Error

As stated earlier, it is the purpose of this chapter to study how one may know the difference in error that separates men from God and error that does not. Error that causes fellowship to cease between man and God is "fatal error." Error that should make no difference in fellowship is called "non-fatal error." Again, it must be emphasized that without a correct understanding of how to ascertain Bible authority one cannot make the aforementioned delineation between fatal and non-fatal error.

Furthermore, it must be forcefully stressed that no one can practice any kind of error, knowing that such practice is erroneous, and remain in fellowship with God. This is nothing more or less than hypocrisy, and all hypocrisy is sin (fatal error, a violation of an obligatory matter). Since hypocrisy is not the subject chapter, those who knowingly practice error will not be addressed; suffice it to say that they are lost in so doing. This study will confine itself to those persons who believe that they are practicing certain New Testament truths, but in reality they are not.

An incidental point, speaking of hypocrisy, is that due to our human limitations all of us will more than likely die in fellowship with certain people who are themselves not in fellowship with God. We are responsible for what we humanly **know** about another's faith and conduct and not that person's secret sins.

Obligatory and Non-Obligatory Matters

Man is responsible to God. When he learns that he is responsible to God, he will seek to learn what his obligations to God are with the full intent to discharge them. This is the very point of Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 15:58; Galatians 5:6; and Philippians 2:12, to name a few verses that emphasize man's responsibility to learn his duty to God that he may discharge his obligations to Him. This is the reason that we refer to obligatory and non-obligatory matters in the Scrip-

tures. Therefore, our duty to God is discharged only when we comply with what God has obligated us to do.

Without God's Word we do not know God's Will. Without God's Will we do not know what He has authorized. And, without God's authorization man is ignorant of his obligations to God. Hence, authorization precedes obligation (Mat. 7:21-27; John 14:15; Col. 3:17; Tit. 2:11-12; Jam. 1:25; 1 John 2:3-5; 5:3). Suffice it to say in this present study that God's book, the Bible, authorizes by **direct statements, examples, and implication.**¹

In these direct statements, examples, and implications God employs generic and specific terms. This is the case with any language because it is the nature of its communicative element. Greater specification demands more precise terms. However, regardless of the specification and precision in terminology there may be found in every specified act (obligation) **options** for the carrying out of the thing specified (the obligatory matter). Let us notice the following example of the point under consideration.

The biblical mode of baptism for the remission of sins is immersion, and the element into which one is immersed is water (Mat. 28:18-20; Acts 2:38; 8:36; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12). Hence, the mode of baptism and element in which one is baptized is specified. Thereby, the "how to" and the "in what" regarding discharging one's obligation to be baptized is revealed. However, all other things being equal, there may be a number of options available from which one may choose to discharge his obligation to be baptized. Among these options could be bathtubs, baptisteries, rivers, ponds, and various other kinds of bodies of water deep enough to immerse a person.

Furthermore, if one has more than one option available, the choice he makes is to be based on which option will aid him in discharging his obligation to God in the quickest and best way possible. Thus, the option chosen is the one that offers the greatest advantage to one in getting done only what God has authorized one to do. It is the most expeditious choice.

Please note, that there can be no "unity in diversity" in the thing one is obligated before God to do. However, there can and must be "unity and diversity" in optional matters. It may have been most expedient for one person to have been baptized in a river, another in a baptistery in the church house, and still another in a bathtub. The

containers of water in which each was baptized were different (diverse). However, each person did only that which God obligated him to do (unity). Thus, there is liberty in optional matters.

Making an Option Obligatory

To attempt to teach that one is scripturally baptized only if he is baptized in “running water,” as some have believed (and possibly continue to believe), is to make obligatory what is not a part of the scriptural authorization regarding the condition of the water into which one is immersed. However, what if a person believed this erroneous doctrine? Should such a person be baptized in “running water” in order to satisfy his conscience? There is no biblical problem at all in accommodating such a person, as long as he did not demand that **all** be baptized in “running water” in order for their baptism to be scriptural. All other things being equal, baptizing such an individual would not violate any obligatory matter. In this case such a person believes error, but it is not fatal (no obligatory matter is violated by his holding this erroneous belief). Though he bowed more on his conscience than did God, nevertheless he obeyed what God bound upon him. Hence, this is one case where someone could believe error and practice error in such a way that it would have no bearing on scriptural fellowship. Why is this so in this given case? It applies in this situation because the person would be binding this option as an obligatory action on himself and no other person. Furthermore, the binding of the option by this person did not stop him from doing what God obligated him to do in order to be scripturally baptized.

The previous example is what Paul was talking about when he wrote, “Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, *but* not to doubtful disputations” (Rom. 14:1). The problems Paul lists are different, but the principles and reasoning are the same regarding optional or indifferent matters being held as obligatory. Therefore, fellowship can be maintained with persons who believe the kind of error (non-fatal error) that does not cause others to violate what God demands to be saved or remain saved.

If brethren will not cause “doubtful disputations” among the churches by their binding on themselves as obligatory what in reality is optional or indifferent, such they are at liberty to do. Fellowship should remain—but not to the point of allowing their views to bring about discord in the church. A “weak in the faith” brother must not go

beyond himself in making optional or indifferent matters obligatory. This is where the inspired apostle Paul drew the line regarding fellowshipping error of this kind. We have no scriptural authority to move the line Paul drew one way or the other. It is an obligatory line itself. Therefore, it must not be crossed or altered (2 John 9). To do so is to commit fatal error, sin (1 John 3:4; Jam. 4:17).

Thus, by revelation and reason we may deduce that in working out one's own salvation (an obligatory matter, Phi. 2:12), a Christian may obligate himself to be under certain restrictions (options) to which others in working out their own salvation need not be obligated or vice versa. This would also cover matters of conscience which Paul dealt with it in Romans fourteen.

An example of one binding an optional matter on himself for his own spiritual well-being, which option he could not bind on others, is seen in the life of the late brother G. K. Wallace. Brother Wallace related to me that for him to read a newspaper before worship on the Lord's Day was something he would not do because he wanted his mind to be only on the upcoming assembly of worship and his involvement therein. He wanted no possibility for distractions from worship to enter his mind. It violated his conscience to do so.

Before attending worship on Sunday almost everyone has the option of being exposed to secular news. If brother Wallace's action was so spiritually nutritious, why did he not teach that all Christians sin if they expose themselves to secular news before worship on the Lord's Day? The answer is a simple one. He had no biblical authority to bind such a thing on others. All other things being equal, imagine someone affirming that it is a sin to be exposed to secular news preceding worship on the Lord's day. Yet, I have heard good brethren argue that they opposed certain actions simply because of where they might lead.

Over and over again those who opposed church cooperation by one church taking the oversight of a work and other churches sending support to said church to aid in that work have opposed such actions because of where they thought it would lead. According to them such could lead to the sponsoring church eldership ruling over the churches that contributed to the work it sponsored. Well, of course such is a possibility. So are a myriad of other erroneous things. But, such erroneous actions do not automatically follow. Moreover, it will not

happen among brethren who are determined to do only what God has obligated men to do in the New Testament regarding the autonomy and organization of the Lord's church.

However, a congregation's elders may deem it not expedient to so cooperate. Fine, let them stay out of it. It is an optional matter. No one is saying that this is the only way such has to be done—any more than brother G. K. Wallace demanded that everyone forgo reading a newspaper before going to worship. However, there must be some way that one will discharge his obligations to spread the gospel to the whole world. It is the discharging of the obligation that God demands, not, all other things being equal, the method or option whereby it is done. Most of us could fellowship the various anti-churches (as previously set out in this chapter)—if they would recognize their prohibitions for being what they in actuality are—optional and not obligatory matters. But because they are determined to make optional matters obligatory (and thus bind on men what God did not bind to the division of the church) fellowship is impossible.

Another example of fellowship between brethren (wherein error is involved) pertains to the manner or mode of the Holy Spirit's indwelling the Christian. There are two basic differences among faithful brethren regarding the manner or mode of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. One position teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian directly and without a medium, but alongside and in harmony with the Word of God. The other position teaches that the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian only through the medium of the Word of God. Both positions cannot be scripturally correct. What, therefore, allows for fellowship to exist between the believers of the two views? Both positions demand that we must do only what is authorized by the New Testament (the sword of the Spirit, Eph. 6:17). Therefore, those holding both positions understand that the instruction from God revealing man's obligations to Him and how he must discharge them are found **only** in the Bible. Hence, we all teach the same things regarding how to ascertain Bible authority and to discharge obligatory matters.

Neither of the previously mentioned positions necessarily deals with God's special providence (miracles) or His general providential activities (his day to day involvement in and control of the universe). Miracles have long ago ceased (1 Cor. 13:8-12; Eph. 4:8-13; Jam.

1:25). Regarding God's general providence, who knows what specific things the Father, Son, Holy Spirit, and the angels are doing on our behalf? The answer is, no one knows. To attempt to figure out the details of such matters is a waste of time. These things are in God's arena of conduct, and we are simply not given the wherewithal to go beyond the fact of such activities.

However, whatever the Godhead and the angels are doing on behalf of (for) Christians does not make null and void our responsibility to ascertain from the Bible our obligations to God. Having thereby learned our responsibilities to God, we then discharge our obligations to Him in the only way it is humanly possible to do so—by obeying His Will (Psa. 119:172; 1 John 2:29; 5:3). Thus, our faith in God, Christ, and the gospel system is made known to all (Jam. 2:14-26).

We may, therefore, conclude that any doctrine pertaining to the indwelling of the Holy Spirit that removes from man the responsibility of doing anything that the Bible obligates him to do in order to be saved or remain saved (obligatory matters) is fatal error. On the other hand, any doctrine regarding the Holy Spirit that is not contrary to a biblical obligation is not fatal error.

Leaving the specific subject of the mode or manner in which the Holy Spirit indwells the Christian, we may also affirm the following proposition. **Any doctrine that removes from man the responsibility of doing anything that the Bible obligates him to do to be saved or remain saved (obligatory matters) is fatal error.** Notice that such is fatal error **only** because it removes from man the responsibility of doing something that the Bible obligates him to do in order to be saved and remain saved. Though one may teach error, no one has biblical authority to label anyone a false teacher **unless** the error taught removes from man the responsibility of doing something that the Bible obligates him to do to be saved or remain saved (obligatory matters). Moreover, a *loosing* preacher, such as Max Lucado (one who teaches doctrines that loose men from what God obligates them to do), does not have enough interest in authority in general and biblical authority in particular to care one way or the other about the preceding affirmation pertaining to when error is fatal.

Furthermore: **Any doctrine that places on man a greater responsibility concerning what one must do to be saved and remain saved than what the Bible obligates him to do, which greater**

responsibility results in the disruption of fellowship among faithful brethren, is fatal error. In this case such is fatal error not simply because one binds on himself more than what the Bible obligates one to do to be saved and remain saved (a private matter such as being baptized in running water), but he has sought to **bind** such a doctrine on others to the **disruption of fellowship** among faithful brethren. There is not a preacher of the *binding* or *loosing* variety on the face of the earth who understands the truth of the preceding proposition. If the *binding* preacher did understand it, he would seldom be found for very long binding on men what God in His Word has not bound on him to the disruption of fellowship among brethren.

CONCLUSION

When the apostle Paul declared, “that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment” (1 Cor. 1:10), he was speaking of obligatory matters (those things pertaining to one’s salvation). He was not speaking of optional matters, except as elders chose which option is the most expedient for the church they superintend. Then, members are obligated to obey the elders in their choice of such expedients (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:7, 17). Neither was he speaking of incidental matters that have no bearing on one discharging his obligations to God (“many lights,” “upper chamber,” “at night”—Acts 20:7-8).

The New Testament authorizes us to cease fellowship with a certain class of brethren. They must be brethren who believe, teach, or practice false doctrine. For a doctrine to be false, as the New Testament defines a false doctrine, it must remove from man the responsibility of doing at least one thing that the Bible obligates him to do to be saved and remain saved. Or, its teaching must obligate one to do more than the Bible obligates him to do to be save or remain saved to the disruption of fellowship among the brethren.

Whether one knowingly **binds** where God has not bound or **looses** where God has not loosed regarding obligatory matters, neither mindset is content to serve God as His Word obligates them to do. Each is in rebellion to God. When people operate in such a way, they have elevated themselves to the position of God. They, therefore, are walking in the steps of their father the devil, who originated such an attitude and action (John 8:44).

Let us learn how the New Testament authorizes. Thereby we will learn what our obligations to God are. Having so learned our obligations, we will see the most expeditious (advantageous) option(s) available at the time and place to discharge our obligations. Furthermore, we will learn that unless a doctrine removes from man the responsibility to discharge his obligations to God or binds upon him more than what God obligated him to do (to the disruption of fellowship of the brethren), such a person may not scripturally be labeled a false teacher. Thus, while we may not like what he teaches, and we may think that his teaching is erroneous, he is not teaching fatal error. In fact, it may not be expeditious (advantageous) for the church to use such a person as an elder, preacher, deacon, teacher, leader in public worship, etc., but such does not mean that such a person is out of fellowship with God (Acts 15:37-41). Thus, such a person remains in fellowship with God and should remain in fellowship with other faithful brethren.

Let us learn that God's laws of exclusion and inclusion are obligatory matters. Therefore, we dare not include into the church's fellowship anyone who is not in fellowship with God. On the other hand, we dare not exclude someone in fellowship with God from our fellowship. To be found guilty of doing either one is to be in violation of an obligatory matter. By such action (if we do not repent of it before we leave this world) we will spend eternity in hell.

Once a little boy asked God if He had commanded: "Do unto others **as** they have done unto us." He continued his statement to God by giving his reason for wanting to be sure of what God had said. He said: "Because if you did, I'm going to really 'put it on somebody.'" At first glance this story is a bit humorous. But, if we were more like the little boy, we would go to God to make sure that we understood His will before we set about to "put it on somebody." I am not of the disposition of mind to withdraw from persons and then let God sort them out on the Day of Judgment. With that mindset I do not see how I could "make the cut" myself.

ENDNOTE

¹For a more thorough discussion of how to ascertain Bible authority, see my chapter in the 1997 Bellview Lectures, *Leadership*, ed. Michael Hatcher (Pensacola, FL: Bellview Church of Christ, 1997), pp. 105-118.

FELLOWSHIP AND THE WORLD

Joel Wheeler



Joel Wheeler was born March 16, 1952 in Tuscaloosa, Alabama. He graduated from Tuscaloosa High School and attended Freed-Hardeman College (now Freed-Hardeman University) from 1970 to 1972. Married to the former Susan Midgett of Annapolis, Maryland, and they have one married son and two daughters. He attended the Memphis School of Preaching in January, 1985, and completed his studies in January, 1987. He also attended Williams College toward a World History degree. He worked with the Antioch congregation in Blue Springs, Mississippi and with the church in Thayer, Missouri. He is presently working with the Foley, Alabama, congregation. He has held gospel meetings in Ohio, Missouri, Arkansas, and Alabama. He is involved with door knocking campaigns in Tennessee, Missouri, and Ohio. He has done missionary work in Usinsk and Murmansk, Russia. His local work includes a daily radio program.

INTRODUCTION

The fellowship that is found in the Holy Writ has a very beautiful and meaningful interpretation. It has been translated from the Greek word *koinonia* which means “communion, fellowship, sharing in common.”¹ It is also taken from the Greek verb *sunkoinoneo* which means “fellowship with” or “partakers of.”² Thus the true and practical meaning of fellowship is the sharing in common, participating together, striving for the same goal and purpose. If there is any unity in the local congregation it must be striving together for the sincere purpose of preaching the gospel for the saving of souls. Someone has described the idea of fellowship as a wheel with all the spokes attached from the hub to the rim. All spokes become fellows when they share in the same load making it possible to support the wheel in its functioning. Fellowship among God’s people is crucial for the church to function as God intended. Fellowship among Christians is absolutely necessary in the kingdom of God. However, there are certain harmful and dangerous areas of the Christian life in which fellowship is forbidden. We will discuss one of those areas in this lesson.

THE WORLD DEFINED

The inspired apostle John wrote:

Love not the world, neither the things *that are* in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that *is* in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world (1 John 2:15-16).

There are two key words found in this text: one is *love* and the other is *world*. “Love” is translated from *agapao* which is defined by Strong’s in relation of persons as “to welcome, to entertain, to be fond of, to love dearly.”³ Its definition in relationship to things is “to be well pleased, to be contented at or with a thing.”⁴ This kind of love that the apostle John uses to caution Christians shows a dangerous relationship or fellowship that one may have with the world. If an individual loves a person or things, then he will be drawn and compelled to have fellowship with it.

The other key word that John uses to forewarn Christians of the dangers is *world*. The definitions given by Webster is “(1)The Earth, 2) Human life, 3) The purely material concerns of human life as contrast with the spiritual: the part of mankind chiefly occupied with material concern, worldly persons.”⁵ *World* has several different meanings in the Bible. Strong’s gives the word *kosmos* eight different meanings in his Greek Lexicon. It is defined as: (1) order; (2) decoration; (3) the universe; (4) the circle of the earth; (5) the inhabitants of the earth; (6) human race; (7) the ungodly multitude; (8) world affairs such as advantages, pleasures, or a general collection of particulars such as races of people.⁶ It should be obvious that *world* in both the English and the Greek carries with it a wide variety of definitions. One must use common sense and the context of the Scripture to understand the true meaning of the verse.

As John writes, “Love not the world,” he does not refer to the world as the earth or inanimate matter. The earth is not evil, for God created “the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1). Speaking to the people in Athens, the apostle Paul says, “God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands” (Acts 17:24). At the end of the sixth day of creation the Bible reads, “And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, *it was* very good. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day” (Gen. 1:31). Not only was the creation good

but it was **very good**. Truly there is nothing evil about God's great and glorious creation of the heavens and the planet earth.

As John writes, "Love not the world," he is not forbidding us to love humanity or mankind. The Bible clearly teaches that we ought to love our neighbor (Mat. 22:39), to do good unto all men (Gal. 6:10), add to our faith brotherly kindness and charity (2 Pet. 1:7), love one another with a pure heart fervently (1 Pet. 1:22). The greatest example of love toward mankind is given when Jesus said, "For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Man cannot save himself, it is only through the power of the gospel that man can receive forgiveness of his sins (Jer. 10:23; Rom. 1:16-17). Jesus said that His mission on earth was to seek and save the lost which includes us all (Luke 19:10).

The apostle John's reference to the *world* simply means the ideas, philosophies, and pleasures that the world has to offer. Society and humanity is engulfed in sin which does not carry the same values or standards as God requires of man. Isaiah wrote:

For my thoughts *are* not your thoughts, neither *are* your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For *as* the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts (Isa. 55:8-9).

Man cannot comprehend the infinite power and wisdom of God. Man considers himself as deity by determining the self-made standard for right and wrong.

"The things *that are* in the world" (1 John 2:15) are the material possessions and objects of man. Many worship objects and are deceived into believing that those things will bring happiness. Covetousness has been defined as the love or worship of things; Paul identifies covetousness as idolatry (Col. 3:5). Many individuals would gladly exchange their souls for material things. Jesus said, "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). All of the material possessions in the world cannot equal the value of a man's soul. We are living in an age when some individuals would even sell their children for material goods.

THE LUST OF THE FLESH

The inspired writer and beloved apostle John identifies three areas of temptation which are considered to be generated from the world. The lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are said by John to have their source with the world. The lust of the flesh would be all temptations which have their roots in appetites and needs of the body.⁷ The physical needs of the body are not sinful within themselves, but it is the abuse and over-indulging. It is not a sin to be hungry. Hunger is a natural desire that awakens the body for the need of nourishment, and without nourishment the body would perish. Jesus prayed to the Father: "Give us this day our daily bread" (Mat. 6:11). Bread is necessary to sustain life, and Jesus even used it as an analogy for sustaining spiritual life (John 6:31-58). If an infant never cried when he was hungry, then his parents would not know when to feed him, and the child would die from malnutrition. Yet we realize that an over-indulgence of the wrong kinds of foods causes many health problems. God has placed limitations and boundaries for our fleshly desires.

Another area in which God has set boundaries is sexual needs. Paul wrote:

Now concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me: *It is good for a man not to touch a woman. Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband* (1 Cor. 7:1-2).

Fornication is the abuse of the sexual needs and desires which God has given to man. In the Garden of Eden marriage was ordained by God, and the sexual needs of man and woman have been placed within the realm of the marriage bond. The inspired writer penned "Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled: but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge" (Heb. 13:4). The marriage bed is for the pleasure of husband and wife. It is also to perpetuate the human race, for without the sexual desires the human race would soon fade away. God considers those who indulge in sexual activity outside the marriage bond as whoremongers and adulterers who will face the terror of the Lord on the great day of judgment (2 Cor. 5:10-11). The inspired apostle Paul in writing to the churches in Galatia named the works of the flesh which cannot inherit the kingdom of God. Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, and lasciviousness are sexual sins (Gal.

5:19) which are contrary to the Spirit (Gal. 5:17). The lust of the flesh is a powerful tool which the devil uses daily to tempt and destroy man. “For this is the will of God, *even* your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication” (1 The. 4:3). God’s children are not set apart for the purpose of fornication and immorality but for holiness and purity (Rom. 6:22).

THE LUST OF THE EYES

The lust of the eyes is the avenue through which outward things of the world (riches, pomp, and beauty) inflame us.⁸ Jesus said:

But I say unto you, That whosoever looketh on a woman to lust after her hath committed adultery with her already in his heart. And if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee: for it is profitable for thee that one of thy members should perish, and not *that* thy whole body should be cast into hell (Mat. 5:28-29).

Adultery begins in the heart of an individual, and what is seen with the eyes triggers the unlawful desires. If a man looks upon a woman with the intent of committing adultery, he yielded to the lust of the eyes and committed adultery already in his mind.

Another category in the lust of the eyes is covetousness. The lust of the eyes was the alluring sight that triggered the sin of covetousness in the heart of Achan. He was the man who was tempted to take the first fruits of Canaan which belonged to the Lord. When Joshua confronted Achan with what he had done, he said, “When I saw among the spoils a goodly Babylonish garment, and two hundred shekels of silver, and a wedge of gold of fifty shekels weight, then I coveted them, and took them” (Jos. 7:21). It would have been better for Achan and his family if he had his eyes plucked out before he saw the material substance. The lust of the eyes provoked his covetous heart to take the possessions that God required to be given to Him. The lust of the eyes led to the destruction of Achan, his family, and his possessions. The bodies of Achan’s family and all of his possessions were burned and buried to appease the wrath of God against Israel (Jos. 7:24-26).

One other famous temptation of the lust of the eyes is the desire for power. Luke records that Satan showed unto Jesus “all the kingdoms of the world in a moment of time” (Luke 4:5). The devil was offering Jesus control of all of the kingdoms of the world if He would only fall at his feet and worship him. Worshiping the devil seems to

be a small thing to many individuals when they compare what is obtained by doing so. The lust of the eyes causes many individuals to worship Satan and compromise their standard of life. Jesus showed us how to withstand Satan's temptation by saying "Get thee behind me, Satan: for it is written, Thou shalt worship the Lord thy God, and him only shalt thou serve" (Luke 4:8).

The lust of the eyes is a temptation which can easily be avoided. Paul wrote "Abstain from all appearance of evil" (1 The. 5:22). Evil can be seen, and our eyes should be used to recognizing it with the intention of avoiding it. If it looks wrong or sinful, it should be avoided. Many try to convince themselves that there is nothing wrong with being at a dance if they are not dancing. Is sinful to sit at a bar if one is not drinking? That logic is easily defeated by asking another simple question. Who wants to be sitting at a bar when the Lord comes again? Who wants to be at a dance hall when the world comes to an end? The very appearance of such associations is trouble for the Christian. But too many times individuals go looking for trouble and temptation instead of avoiding it.

THE PRIDE OF LIFE

The third area of temptation about which John admonishes all Christians, is the pride of life. The pride of life would be all the things pertaining to this life, of which the men of the world boast, and by which their pride is gratified.⁹ Men in all eras of history have craved power and self-reliance. Men have persisted in pride and self-reliance throughout all world civilizations exalting themselves above the authority of God.

An Old Testament prophet dedicates an entire book against a small nation that relied upon their physical strength and strategic location rather than God. The Edomites were swelling with the pride of life and had positioned themselves into a geographical location in which no army could reach them. The prophet of Israel warned them when he said, "Though thou exalt *thyself* as the eagle, and though thou set thy nest among the stars, thence will I bring thee down, saith the LORD" (Oba. 4). The descendants of Esau were lifted up with pride and boasted that no army could take their seemingly invincible fortress. The all-powerful God of heaven obliterated their homes and nation by long-hated enemies from the South. The inspired writer penned:

“Pride *goeth* before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall” (Pro. 16:18).

The pride of life leads to self-destruction whether in this life or the day of judgment. One of the things that the Lord hates and is an abomination to Him is a “proud look” (Pro. 6:16-17). The great Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar was lifted up with pride when he declared that it was he that had built great Babylon by his power and might. God used Nebuchadnezzar to punish the children of Israel for idolatry and the enemies of God’s people for cruelty. God brought the King of Babylon to his senses and removed his prideful spirit by causing him to lose his mind for seven years. Nebuchadnezzar was forced out of the royal palace and the comforts of luxury to live and act like a wild animal in the field. After God restored the king’s intellect back to him, Nebuchadnezzar realized it was the God of Israel that had given him all that he possessed (Dan. 4:29-34).

Pride was the reason for the great apostasy in the first century church. Many warnings are repeated throughout the Scriptures to prevent a departure from God’s pattern for the church. The apostle Paul described the falling away that would take place before the Lord’s second coming. He wrote:

Let no man deceive you by any means: for *that day shall not come*, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition; Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God (2 The. 2:3-4).

One can easily notice that the man of sin is lifted up with great pride. He has lifted himself above God and even above God’s authority in worship. Pride is the cause of great spiritual blindness in which billions of individuals have lost their souls. Paul warned of pride when he said that these would not listen to truth and will turn their doctrine unto fables (2 Tim. 4:3-4). Sound doctrine must be preached when it is convenient (and even when it is not convenient) to prevent the sin of pride from overtaking the church.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE WORLD MAKES ENEMIES WITH GOD

One can easily read of the enemies of the Almighty God in both Old and New Testaments. The prophet Samuel recorded a man who

was over nine feet tall that defied the God of Israel until a boy with five stones withstood him and slew him. When courageous David challenged Goliath, he was just a young lad, but he knew that God would deliver the ungodly Philistine into his hand. It did not take a large army to surround Goliath, nor did it take massive weapons of warfare. It only took one rock guided by the hand of Jehovah God to bring the intimidating adversary of Israel to his knees (1 Sam. 17). When David returned from the slaughter of the Philistines, he was carrying the head of Goliath in his hand. This giant of a man, who was larger than any human being in the world, was now dead. His days of cursing God and terrorizing the Israelites came suddenly to an end when God got involved.

Another enemy of God was Pharaoh during the days of Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage. After eighty years of preparing Moses to lead the captive nation of Israel out of Egypt, God sent him to Pharaoh. Moses demanded by the authority of the Lord that Israel be released from slavery. Pharaoh replied, "Who is the LORD, that I should obey his voice to let Israel go? I know not the LORD, neither will I let Israel go" (Exo. 5:2). This defiant enemy of God lost his firstborn son. He then lost his massive army as God overthrew them in the Red Sea (Exo. 12:29; Psalms 136:15). Pharaoh and Goliath lived by the standards of the world which made them an enemy of God.

There are many individuals and nations in the world who array themselves as enemies of God. Atheists, Evolutionists, and Agnostics are just a few of the groups that openly declare themselves against God. Although there are many groups and individuals that openly denounce God, one does not need to declare war against God to be an enemy of God. Jesus plainly said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). Many in the world struggle to lead a passive and inactive Christian life, but this cannot be with God's children. No one can be neutral and serve God.

James, the inspired writer, recorded, "Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God" (James 4:4). John wrote that the whole world is wallowing in the filth of sin. Satan is the enemy of God and he seeks to destroy man as a wild beast would devour the helpless. The world serves idols, and

idolatry is the worship of things which is regarded by God as spiritual adultery. The patrons of the world are adulterers and unfaithful in the eyes of God. It is impossible to be friends with the world and be faithful to God's service. The world and God are opposite.

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE WORLD TELLS THE LOCATION OF THE HEART

The heart is the chief organ of physical life; it occupies the most important place in the human system. The word *heart* came to stand for man's entire mental and moral activity, both rational and the emotional elements.¹⁰ The apostle Paul wrote to the church at Colosse to relocate their hearts to a permanent location. They had their hearts set in the wrong place and should have been looking toward heaven. Paul instructs them as he writes:

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth. For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God. When Christ, *who is our life*, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry (Col. 3:1-5).

Those that are in fellowship with the world have anchored their affections on the wrong side of eternity. This old world will not stand forever as some believe that it will. Our citizenship is not on this earth, but it is in heaven (Phi. 1:20). Christians will not find happiness and peace on earth but only from above.

The apostle Peter wrote against the Universalist philosophy concerning the end of time and the destruction of the world.

But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up (2 Pet. 3:10).

Along with the earth, all of our worldly hopes, desires, needs, ideas, philosophies, and etc., will be destroyed. We are going to leave this world and its associations regardless of whether we want to or not. We must get our hearts in the right place or else we will never desire to leave this place. Jesus said:

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: But lay up

for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal: For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also (Mat. 6:19-21).

Treasure is that which comes first in life. Many bow to the things of this world rather than yielding themselves as servants to righteousness. The things of this world are not eternal and was never meant to be permanent. Yet many hold on to the temporal things which will rust and decay. The Lord insists that we make a permanent investment and establish our riches in an eternal location. Material things can never satisfy the quickened spirit, and the riches of the world often choke out spiritual life. We must see life in its true light and avoid materialistic philosophies of the world. The love of money has drowned the souls of many men in hell by laying up treasures on earth and not in heaven (1 Tim. 6:6-10).

FELLOWSHIP WITH THE WORLD PRODUCES THE UNFRUITFUL WORKS OF DARKNESS

All of those who professionally study human behavior will agree that man is influenced by his surroundings and associations. This is exactly the reason that the apostle Paul so strongly warned Christians of this danger. He wrote, "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). Fellowship or association with the world produces the dark works of the devil. If one is constantly fed the dialogue of the world, he will soon speak the dialogue of the world. It is easy to incorporate cursing, swearing, and profanity into our vocabulary. James, the inspired writer, warns of the dangers that involve a loose and uncontrollable tongue. He writes, "The tongue *is* a fire, a world of iniquity: so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature; and it is set on fire of hell" (Jam. 3:6). Fellowship with the world will cause an unbridled and unrestrained tongue which will send many straight to the fires of hell.

Fellowship with the world will also produce the dress of the world. The widespread fashion of the world is to wear as little clothing and to expose as much flesh as possible. Hollywood and New York City have dictated the standard for fashionable apparel for many decades to the rest of the world. Christians, both young and old, must not be entrapped into the standard of moral code that the world has set. Too many Christians try to live by the world's standard of dress for fear of

being rejected. Too many mothers allow their daughters to dress immodestly for acceptance among their peers. Paul instructed:

In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array; But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works (1 Tim. 2:9-10).

The men and women of America today have no shame or modesty. We are constantly being fed, every waking second, with immodest dress and acts of immorality. Most of our young people have been programmed with immorality and will not resist when faced when temptation strikes. Many young Americans believe that if they do not dress as the world, then they will be outcasts and misfits.

Fellowship with the world produces the unfruitful habits of the world. The strategy of the business industry is to be a social and recreational creature. Advertisers portray the successful person as one who indulges in life's pleasures. The message is to "grab all the gusto you can in life," which includes the habits of alcohol and tobacco. Beer advertisers have drawn countless numbers of teenagers and young adults into the social circle of drunkenness. According to *U. S. News & World Report* "Almost 40 percent of male college students drink beer regularly."¹¹ It is quite obvious that these college students turn to alcohol for acceptance among their peers. The world will accept this kind of behavior, but God does not. Paul wrote, "And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Eph. 5:18). The wise proverb writer said, "Wine is a mocker, strong drink is raging; and whosoever is deceived thereby is not wise" (Pro. 20:1). Not only God has condemned the sin of drunkenness, but also strongly condemned those who contribute to others drinking. God's prophet said, "Woe unto *him* that giveth his neighbour drink, that putteth thy bottle to *him*, and maketh him drunken also, that thou mayest look on their nakedness!" (Hab. 2:15). Does God hold a person accountable for contributing to the drunkenness of another individual? He did the enemies of Israel. In fact, Habakkuk recorded that God's right hand would be turned against them (Hab. 2:16).

Many try to justify the use of alcohol by saying that Jesus turned water into wine (John 2:9). The word wine found in the Greek is *oinos*, which does not of itself indicate the content of alcohol.¹² When fresh from the vats, it was non-intoxicating, but with age it grew

stronger and acquired some alcoholic content. The kind that was produced by Jesus was fresh grape juice and not intoxicating wine. The Lord would never produce nor give to any that which is so strongly condemned in the Scriptures by the inspired writers (Rom. 13:13; Gal. 5:21; Eph. 5:18). The Lord would not give intoxicating wine to others and then condemn them for drunkenness!

Not only is drunkenness condemned, but thousands of innocent people are killed each year. It is estimated that 23,500 Americans are killed and 700,000 are injured from alcohol related car accidents each year.¹³ No man lives to himself; others pay the terrible price of suffering and death from the sins of the drunkard. Only the fellowship with the world produces a lust for alcohol. Christians have absolutely no business selling, serving, or drinking intoxicating beverages. Those who participate in such debauchery have their eyes blinded to the terrible devastation that will come.

CONCLUSION

God is not the author of temptation, but it comes from Satan and the fellowship with the world. James warned Christians that when lust is conceived it brings forth sin, and sin when it is finished brings forth spiritual death (Jam. 1:14-15). Fellowship with the world leads to yielding to the lusts of the world. Sin controls our life by bowing to the temptations of Satan. Fellowship with the world has caused the majority of mankind to lose their souls in the eternal fires of hell. They become the servants of sin rather than servants of righteousness (Rom. 6:12). The Lord warned:

But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death (Rev. 21:8).

Those mentioned in the Scriptures are those who have a fellowship with the world. Those that are friends with the world are the enemies of God, and those that are friends of God are enemies of the world (Jam. 2:24; 4:4). No one can have fellowship with the world and fellowship with God.

ENDNOTES

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⁵Henry Cecil Wyld & Eric H. Portridge, *Complete and Unabridged The Little and Ives Webster Dictionary* (New York, NY: J. J. Little & Ives Co., 1963), p. 1587.

⁶Strong, p. 43.

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¹²Guy N. Woods, *A Commentary on The Gospel According to John* (Nashville, TN: Gospel Advocate Company, 1984), p. 52.

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WHY WE CANNOT FELLOWSHIP DENOMINATIONS

Ronnie Hayes



Ronald Ethbert Hayes was born November 26, 1954, in Birmingham, Alabama. He attended Freed-Hardeman College, Memphis School of Preaching, and Alabama Christian School of Religion. His first full time work was in Aubrey, Arkansas, where he stayed over six years. He spent 12 years with the congregation in Barn Creek, Alabama. He is currently working with the congregation in Falkville, Alabama. He speaks on several gospel meetings and lectureships each year. Ronnie has served on the Board of Directors at Indian Creek Youth Camp to 15 years.

Ronnie is married to the former Cynthia Reeves and they have three children: Leah, Kyle and Anna.

INTRODUCTION

Much has been said and written about fellowship. It seems that most of what has been written pertains to whom one should or should not have fellowship. Therefore, we will not spend a lot of time on that aspect of fellowship. For our study, it is necessary for us to define *fellowship* as: “communion, sharing in common; partnership; denotes a partaker or partner.”¹ It seems that everyone has his or her way of including or excluding individuals when it comes to the subject of fellowship. The truth on the subject of fellowship is very simple: **the Bible sets the boundaries on fellowship!** John penned these words on fellowship:

This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all. 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 (1 John 1:5-7).

As Christians, we can only have fellowship with those who are in fellowship with Christ. This is not a matter of personalities or preferences, but a matter of truth.

As we look at this topic: “Why we cannot fellowship denominations,” some implications seem to be apparent. First, there is the fact

that we are not to have fellowship with denominations. Second, there is a danger involved in having fellowship with denominations. And third, the fact that we are studying this subject implies some have transcended the boundaries established by God and are having fellowship with denominations.

Since much has already been written about fellowship and with whom we are or are not to have fellowship, it is our task to deal with the **why**. **Why are we not to have fellowship with denominations?** (1) Because we are **commanded** not to fellowship with denominations. (2) Because of the danger of **compromise** if we have fellowship with denominations. (3) Because the **cost** is too high. (4) Because our **clarity** or our distinctiveness will be lost. Now, let's investigate each of these points.

WE ARE COMMANDED NOT TO HAVE FELLOWSHIP WITH DENOMINATIONS

Paul states with emphatic terms: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). When it comes to participating with denominations, Christians cannot. As this passage states, instead of being a partaker of the "unfruitful works of darkness," a Christian should be standing against such. Isn't it strange that instead of reproving false teachers, some of our "so-called" gospel preachers want to find common ground on which to build fellowship? It is amazing that some think they are more intelligent than God!

Paul, in speaking to the church at Corinth, says:

But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils (1 Cor. 10:20-21).

Here is another clear command not to have fellowship with those who are separated from God—that is, with those who would worship devils or partake in anything to do with them. People are either with God or against Him. If they are with God, then fellowship can be extended. If they are not with God, then fellowship has to be withheld.

Paul again addresses the subject in 2 Corinthians 6:14-18. In verse fourteen he says, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbeliev-

ers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness?" It is as if Paul is asking, "What are you doing with him?" It simply doesn't make sense. Why would good be hanging around with bad? Why would right want to be associated with wrong? Then some "educated baboon" comes along and says, "One can fellowship false teachers, and it will be all right." Is God wrong all of a sudden? Brethren, this is not that hard. God said do not fellowship those who are not in fellowship with Him (1 John 1:6-7). An individual can try to get around this any way he wants, but it does not change what God has said!

THE DANGER OF COMPROMISE

When one disregards what God has to say about fellowship, then he is in danger of compromising other truths. Compromise has always been a problem which God's people have had to face. Moses was asked to compromise four times by Pharaoh, but he would not allow Pharaoh to keep him from doing what God had commanded (Exo. 8:25, 28; 10:11, 24). The enemies of Nehemiah tried to get him to compromise, but he answered them, "I *am* doing a great work, so that I cannot come down: why should the work cease, whilst I leave it, and come down to you?" (Neh. 6:3).

Compromise is certainly prevalent in the church today, and one of the main reasons is that certain individuals want to have fellowship with those who would teach false doctrine. Who would have believed that the church would have ever compromised on these subjects: faith only, grace only, the one church, the necessity of baptism, changing or expanding roles for women in worship, speaking in tongues, claiming to have the power of the Holy Spirit, or the use of instruments of music? Yet, many are following these "new hermanutical saviors" to do just exactly that!

When a compromise occurs, there are at least three things which happen. First, God's law is broken. Next, the work suffers (Neh. 6:2-3). Last, Satan wins. J. W. McGarvey made this statement to Jessie P. Sewell, as Sewell records in his book:

In January, 1902 or 1903, I was preaching for the Pearl and Bryan Streets church in Dallas. Brother McGarvey, an old man at the time, was invited to speak at the Central Christian Church in Dallas. We had three men in the Pearl and Bryan Streets church who had graduated from the College of the Bible in Lexington, under Brother McGarvey, and they were great admirers of him. They suggested that

we invite Brother McGarvey to preach at Pearl and Bryan that night. We did so. I was just a boy of 24 or 25 then. I was sitting by the side of the great old man on the front seat, waiting for the service to begin. As we sat there talking, Brother McGarvey said to me: "Brother Sewell, I want to say something to you, if you'll accept it in the spirit in which I mean it." I told him I'd appreciate anything he had to say to me. He said about these words, "You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don't ever let anybody persuade you that you can successfully combat error by fellowshiping it and going along with it. I have tried. I believe at the start that was the only way to do it. I've never held membership in a congregation that uses instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinction between churches that used it and churches that didn't. I've gone along with their papers and magazines and things of that sort. During all these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today." He said, "It won't work."²

"Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners" (1 Cor. 15:33). How can anyone suggest that fellowshiping denominations does not corrupt?

THE COST IS TOO HIGH

The idea of fellowshiping denominations has to have some kind of effect on those who would do so. Either it is the right thing to do, and they will receive the blessings of God; or it is the wrong thing to do, and they will suffer God's condemnation. Now which is it?

It has already been shown that having fellowship with denominations is forbidden by God; therefore, it cannot be the right thing to do. If it is not right, then it has to be wrong, and certainly the cost is too high. What will it cost a Christian to fellowship denominations?

Fellowshipping denominations will separates us from God. John warns us when he says:

Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 9-11).

Paul warned the Church at Corinth to "be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). It is impossible to be **with** those in a false religion and **separate** from them at the same time. We have to make a choice! Whose side are we

on? Christ tells us that a choice has to be made. “No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon” (Mat. 6:24). Christ talks about this divided allegiance and makes it very plain that we need to be on one side or the other when He says, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad” (Mat. 12:30). The question is: “Whose side are you on?” The answer will be seen, at least in part, by whom you fellowship!

Fellowshipping denominations will destroy your influence to do good. Paul, speaking to the Church at Philippi, said:

If *there be* therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, Fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, *being* of one accord, of one mind...That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world; Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain (Phi. 2:1-2, 15-16).

Paul tells the brethren at Philippi of the importance of having the same mind, or being like-minded. This idea of being of the same mind, or united, is often mentioned in the Bible (1 Cor. 1:10; 2 Cor. 13:11; Eph. 4:3; Phi. 1:27; 1 Pet. 3:8). Then Paul says that as Christians, they are going to shine as lights among this world. They are to shine because of what they are. What if they just lose that distinctiveness and become as everyone else? Will they shine? The answer has to be, **“Of course not!”** Simply by fellowshipping denominations, a person loses his ability to influence for good. How could an individual encourage others to obey the truth and leave a denomination if he himself fellowships that denomination? How could one show a practice, such as singing with instruments of music, to be unscriptural and wrong, if when the instruments are being used, he will not take a stand against them? Is it not evident, that if we preach one thing and practice another, our influence for good will be destroyed?

Fellowshipping denominations will devalue the Word of God (Gal. 1:6-7). Why would fellowshipping denominations devalue the Word of God? It is very simple. Denominations devalue the Word of God, and if we hold up their hands, then we start “rethinking” our positions and changing from the truth unto error. All of a sudden, God’s Word

doesn't mean what it has always meant, according to those who want to hold up the hands of these false teachers. For example, some want to question baptism, as if it is not necessary. How could one even question baptism with all the Bible has to say about it (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16; Acts 2:38; 8:35-39; 10:34-35, 47-48; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:21)? It is easy to question these things when one doesn't value God's Word. Some diehard members of denominations say, "I would not trade what I feel in my heart for a stack of Bibles." Now how much value of God's Word is in a statement like that? There is **none**! Then others, after extending the right hand of fellowship to denominations, want to suggest that using instruments of music in worship is just a matter of choice. These same brethren, just a few years ago, were debating it is wrong. Now all of a sudden, it is right! What happened? What has happened is they started fellowshipping denominations, which results in one of two things: condone them in their actions, or condemn them for their error. If the first choice is made, the Word of God loses value. The cost of this is just too great! The Word of God is powerful (Rom. 1:16), inspired (2 Tim. 3:16-17), that by which we will be judged (John 12:48), discerning (Heb. 4:12), and it is truth (John 17:17). One may try to devalue the word, but they end up devaluing their soul.

OUR CLARITY WILL BE LOST

When Christians extend fellowship to a denomination, then our clarity or distinctiveness is lost. A simple illustration to confirm this is of two flowing streams: one is muddy and the other is clear. When the two streams meet, what happens? The water then becomes dingy. They both lose their distinctiveness. The same is true with the church. We cannot "join up" with these denominations and not expect to lose our distinctiveness. We are told to stand firm (1 Cor. 15:58; Gal. 5:1; 1 Pet. 5:9), not to be wavering back and forth! Yet, there are some who think they can flirt with error and not suffer any ill effect. When brethren cavort with error, it will effect them (1 Cor. 15:33).

Christ taught of one true church. Which denomination is going to do that? He only promised one (Mat. 16:13-19). Peter only opened one door on the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:14-47). Paul describes the body, the church, as one (Eph. 1:22-23; 4:4; Col. 1:18). These are not the statements denominations make. They say, "Attend the church of your choice," or "it doesn't make any difference where you go; just

go” or “I’m okay, you’re okay.” Instead of trying to unite under the Word of God, the idea of “**one**” church is laughed at or mocked. How can we then fellowship someone who is teaching the opposite of what the Bible teaches? Would it not give strength to their position of many churches all being okay? Of course it would, and so do these “false teachers” who are going out from among us! They are doing their best to destroy the distinctiveness of the church!

Which denomination is going to practice the worship prescribed in God’s Word? There are five items of worship mentioned in the New Testament: singing (Col. 3:16), praying (Acts 2:42), giving (1 Cor. 16:1-2), partaking of the Lord’s Supper (Acts 20:7), and studying of God’s Word (Acts 20:7). Every denomination does a part of these at some time, but who, other than the church of Christ, does them all, all the time? Now, those who want new innovations, items other than what God has authorized, can look to the denominations. Just recently, a place in Huntsville was offering to teach “Slow Dancing” for their evening services! Worship, according to most denominations, is nothing more than “Show Time.” They have performances, plays, concerts, shows, circuses, and every now and then they even have some preaching. With all of these things going on, there is no way children of God can be seen holding up their hands. The church would lose a little more of its distinctiveness. People would get to the point that they wouldn’t know what to believe!

Who is going to teach salvation as it is offered in God’s inspired Word? The Bible teaches: an individual must hear God’s Word (Rom. 10:17), believe that Christ is the Son of God (John 8:24), repent of his/her sins (Luke 13:3), confess the glorious name of Christ (Rom. 10:10), and be buried with Christ in baptism (Mark 16:15-16). Everything in the world is taught as “salvation” by these denominations: faith only, grace only, pray your way through, God picks the saved, morals are good enough, and it is different for everyone. It all boils down to how one looks at the Scriptures. If he thinks the Bible is the Word of God, and he must obey it to be saved, then that’s what he will do. On the other hand, if he thinks the Bible is a good book, but not God’s explicit commands, then he will not see the need to adhere to every word. If preachers don’t teach the “One Way” of salvation, (Acts 4:12), then the church would lose its distinctiveness.

At one time the mystery of God was hidden, but now it is made known by the church:

And to make all *men* see what *is* the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ: To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly *places* might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God (Eph. 3:9-10).

To destroy the distinctiveness of the church is to destroy the will of God! We are not to hold up their hands in fellowship. We are to “reprove *them*” (Eph. 5:11).

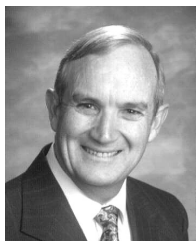
ENDNOTES

¹W. E. Vine, *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words*, (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming H. Revell Company, 1966), p. 90.

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FELLOWSHIP AND THE CORINTHIAN CHURCH

Curtis A. Cates



Curtis A. Cates is the son of a gospel preacher who has been preaching for over thirty years. For over twenty years, he has been engaged in training preachers of the Word. He also has a son who preaches.

He has degrees in Bible, English, Science, History, and Education from Alabama Christian College, Livingston University, and Samford University. He holds the Master of Theology degree from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Education from the University of Alabama. He has done post-doctoral work at Abilene Christian University.

Curtis has served as Professor of Bible and English, Alabama Christian College; Vice President of Academics, Southern Christian University; and, Dean of the College, Columbia Christian College (Portland, Oregon). He has been Director of the Memphis School of Preaching for the last twelve years and continues to teach on the adjunct faculty in Bible and apologetics, Southern Christian University.

He speaks in gospel meetings, lectureships, and mission efforts including Southeast Asia. He has authored several tracts, numerous articles and *The Second Incarnation—A Pattern For Apostasy and Worship: Heaven's Imperative, Or Man's Innovations?* He edits *Yokefellow* and the Memphis School of Preaching lectureship books.

He is married to Annette Bingham Cates and they have two children: Curtis A. Jr., and Daniel Frazier.

INTRODUCTION

The Lord has always demanded unity, but man has undermined God's plan for unity. Man generally has not been content to conform his life to the high standard of God's Word. The result has been that man has preached **union** rather than **unity**. He has attempted to rationalize God's plan out of existence and incorporate his own perverted ideas of what constitutes *unity*. The Lord still said, "He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my sayings, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I spake, the same shall judge him in the last day" (John 12:48). How has man tried to rationalize and undermine Christ's prayer for unity (John 17:20-21)?

First, some people compromise biblical unity by calling for an ecumenical movement which superimposes a structure over all the denominations. Such does not call for unity in convictions but merely for a gigantic fellowship of sectarian groups to cooperate in preaching and carrying out the “social gospel.” Their differences would not be eliminated but would be minimized, recognized as peculiarities of each sect. This could hardly be termed the “one faith,” “the same mind,” “perfected into one.” This would but contribute to disunity, even though they would de-emphasize doctrine.

Second, some compromise biblical unity by agreeing to disagree. The denominations have done this for countless generations. For years, they have called each other “Christians,” had love feasts, been members of the ministerial associations (and, sadly, some preachers in the Lord’s church have yoked up with these sectarians to the detriment of the church and the cause of truth), exchanged pulpits, joined together in Easter-Sunrise services, et al., for many years; yet, they are not one whit closer to the unity demanded by the Lord than when they first began. Their party lines are not healed by their club-meetings, even. Agreeing to disagree can in no way be described as the “one faith,” based upon the oracles of God (1 Pet. 4:11).

Third, some compromise biblical unity by attempting to affirm that unity has never been achieved nor can it ever be achieved. Such affirmation is folly, for the early church achieved it. Note the following expressions: “were together” (Acts 2:44), “with one accord” (Acts 2:46), “one heart and soul” (Acts 4:32), “all with one accord” (Acts 5:12). See also Ephesians 1:15, 22-23; 3:21; Philippians 1:3-7; Colossians 1:18ff; 3:11ff; et al.

Fourth, some compromise biblical unity by affirming that we should simply turn our backs and ignore the differences. Those who advocate such, attempt to defend this abandonment of the unity for which Christ prayed by citing the church at Corinth. This chapter will constitute a discussion of the relation of the Corinthian church to unity and prove that Paul’s dealing with the problems in Corinth **does not defend** but rather **soundly refutes** the averments of the “new unity movement.”

THE ISSUE STATED

Some, in an attempt to *unite* with such sectarians as the Independent Christian Church, have taught that the Lord has two levels of

fellowship, which constitutes the old Ketcherside heresy. They affirm that all who have been baptized for “a right reason” are God’s children and that fellowship is not to be broken as long as they do not commit gross immorality or deny the deity of Christ. Only if one renounces Christ as the Son of God, they aver, does he come under the condemnation of 2 John 9-11.

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

Fellowship is not to be broken, they affirm, whether a person drinks socially or whether mechanical instrumental music is used in worship. (One such false teacher affirms that the apostles, Christ, and all other Christians “generally” drank alcoholic beverages, a matter which is perfectly all right, under certain circumstances—clearly situation ethics.) This has also been used to defend such practices as dancing, clapping, shouting, testifying, and women preaching in worship.

Their argument is this: In spite of the fact that the Corinthian church was plagued with the members following various men, with one living in adultery, with them going to law with each other, with some corrupting the Lord’s Supper, with many denying the resurrection of Christ, et al., they were still addressed as “the church of God which is at Corinth,” and their fellowship with each other was not disrupted—this in spite of their many false doctrines and personal problems. Thus, God’s people must not be divided today, and this is their *defense* of “unity in diversity.”

WHAT CHRIST WANTED IN CORINTH

The Lord’s will for Corinth was the same as for any and all His people—perfection in one, as God and Christ are one (John 17:20-23). This is achievable only as people walk in truth (1 John 1:3, 7). In God and Christ, one sees perfect oneness, not contradictory doctrine and practice; united teaching, not opposing instruction; the same purpose, not opposing aims; united minds, not diverse thinking.

Neither old-line denominationalism nor the “new unity movement” can be considered even a forty-second cousin to the unity of God and Christ. How can one equate an organic union of differing minds, judgments, mouths, and accords man with the unity of one accord,

one mouth, one judgment, and one mind of God? Nothing could be more diametrically opposed than the unity prayed for by Christ and the “new unity movement,” or neo-Ketchersidism of today!

Observe the unity into which the Corinthians were called. One, they were called into “the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord” (1 Cor. 1:9). This is possible only through the message of divine truth (1 John 1:1-7; John 8:32; 17:17ff). Thus, it was the truth that Paul preached unto the Corinthians, not the wisdom of men (1 Cor. 2:1-5); he wanted their faith to be able to stand. He affirmed strongly the verbal inspiration, inerrancy, and all-sufficiency of the holy Scriptures (1 Cor. 2:11-13).

Two, their communion, or fellowship, was with God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 10:16-21; 2 Cor. 13:14), as with the apostles (2 Cor. 3:6), and other Christians (1 John 1:3-7).

Three, the foundation of their faith, of the cause of Christ, was the Lord. Paul stated, “For other foundation can no man lay than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ” (1 Cor. 3:11). Of this, Isaiah prophesied (Isa. 28:16) and Peter confessed (Mat. 16:16-19).

Four, the doctrine Paul taught was (and is) universal truth to be obeyed by all. He urged that he taught the same doctrine of Christ “everywhere in every church” (1 Cor. 4:17). It was not varied to fit the times, the occasion, the crowd, or the popularity (or lack of popularity) of the message. Paul did not subscribe to situation ethics, existential philosophy, or to any other sectarian compromise as do the “new unity” advocates.

Five, Paul affirmed the all-sufficiency of the gospel (1 Cor. 13:10); he urged them to “walk by faith, not by sight” (2 Cor. 5:7). Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17) and heeding the authority of Christ (Mat. 28:18). They were to love the Lord supremely (1 Cor. 16:22).

Six, the Corinthians repented of their sins; they had to abandon the love and practice of sin in order to become Christians.

Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God. And such were some of you: but ye were washed, but ye were sanctified, but ye were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and in the Spirit of our God (1 Cor. 6:9-11).

They were no longer to live in these sins: "What shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound? God forbid. We who died to sin, how shall we any longer live therein?" (Rom. 6:1-2).

Seven, they had to be baptized into the one body; no Christians are outside of the church. "Many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized" (Acts 18:8). "For in one Spirit were we all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, whether bond or free; and were all made to drink of one Spirit" (1 Cor. 12:13). That is where the unity for which Christ prayed exists. To be in Christ is to be in the one body (Eph. 1:22-23; Col. 1:18). No one who has not been baptized scripturally by the authority of Christ for remission of sins is in the body (Mark 16:16; Acts 2:38; 22:16; et al.). The sectarians in the new unity movement term this "Church of Christ doctrine" and "Church of Christ-ism," but Paul and other inspired writers made it Bible doctrine, binding what had already been bound in heaven (Mat. 16:18; 18:18; et al.).

Eight, by being obedient to the truth in being baptized, the Corinthians had called "upon the name of the Lord" and were saved (Rom. 10:13). Saul was instructed, "arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on his name" (Acts 22:16). Thus, Paul wrote that they had been "called *to be* saints, with all that call upon the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in every place, their *Lord* and ours" (1 Cor. 1:2).

Nine, the Corinthians were to continue in faithfulness to Christ. Paul urged, "Be ye imitators of me, even as I also am of Christ" (1 Cor. 11:1). They had the responsibility to keep confessing Christ by continuing to obey the Word. Indeed, Paul would not need commendation from them if they would live right. "Ye are our epistle, written in our hearts, known and read of all men" (2 Cor. 3:2). The "keeping of the commandments of God" was everything (1 Cor. 7:19), for they were "under law to Christ" (1 Cor. 9:21). Some "unity movement" and "unity summit" advocates differ with Paul here, for they say that one is not under law. The Corinthian church was urged by Paul to run faithfully the Christian race; he buffeted his body daily, lest he fall from grace and be a castaway (1 Cor. 9:24-27). He urged faithfulness by citing those Israelites who fell in the wilderness through unbelief (1 Cor. 10:1-12). His prayer was that they "be unproveable in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 1:7-8).

Ten, the Corinthians were to maintain one mind, one doctrine, have no divisions, be in perfect unity.

Now I beseech you, brethren, through the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfected together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Though they were many, yet they were “one bread, one body: for we are all partake of the one bread” (1 Cor. 10:17). They were not to provoke the Lord to jealousy by division and by corrupting the worship (1 Cor. 10:21-22).

DID THE CORINTHIANS MAINTAIN WHAT CHRIST WANTED?

The Corinthians did not maintain the unity and adherence to the Word which Christ commanded. What was Paul’s reaction to this deplorable condition? Did he condone their error? Did he overlook it, refusing even to condemn the false doctrine and sinful division? Or, did he use patience in dealing with the problem, condemning the division and allowing time for the sin to be corrected before taking more severe action? The truth is, no epistle in the New Testament is stronger in rebuking sin and division than is 1 Corinthians. One does not see in the letters to the church at Corinth this “sweet,” tolerant,” “irenic” spirit which is so often on the lips of the advocates of the “new unity movement.”

Note Paul’s inspired reaction to the division and sin in the Corinthian church. Please remember that they were in the midst of a most sinful and degraded environment. Study the worldliness, sexual immorality, and idolatry which pervaded Corinthian society. It was in this type environment that this young church was struggling for survival. There is a vast difference between one’s attitude in correcting and uplifting those struggling to do right against these temptations and in trying to deal with those who have walked in truth in days past, but who are now insisting on going deeper into sin and rebellion against God’s law and who have left the truth and departed from it.

First, the Corinthians had “contentions among you.” They were saying, “I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.” Paul rebuked them, asking, “Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?” He called for them to be united (1 Cor. 1:10; John 17:20-23; Eph. 4:1-6).

Second, they were being influenced and led away from the truth by the teaching and doctrines of men, by Judiazers and others (2 Cor. 11:1-4). Paul warned them “not to go beyond the things which are written; that no one of you be puffed up for the one against the other” (1 Cor. 4:6). They had to return to respect the only authority in religion, Jesus Christ. Cain, Nadab and Abihu, Uzzah, et al., learned the hard way that one must have authority for everything in religious matters. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God (Rom. 10:17; 2 Cor. 5:7; see also Col. 3:17).

Third, some division they had to maintain was not being practiced. They lacked the love necessary to discipline the man living in adultery. Paul commanded

in the name of our Lord Jesus, ye being gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus, to deliver such a one [the adulterer] unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus (1 Cor. 5:4-6).

He condemned them severely, commanding that they purge out the old leaven (1 Cor. 5:3-9). Division is not only allowed but even demanded if we would be united (Mat. 18:15-17; Tit. 3:10-11).

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).

Not only must we withdraw from the immoral but also the false teacher.

Fourth, it was impossible for the Corinthians scripturally to partake of the Lord’s Supper; they were making a mockery of the Supper because of the factions.

When therefore ye assemble yourselves together, it is not possible to eat the Lord’s supper: for in your eating each one taketh before *other* his own supper; and one is hungry, and another is drunken (1 Cor. 11:20-21).

The one bread represented the one body—unity in the church (1 Cor. 10:17ff); however, this church was not united when they partook of the Lord’s Supper. They were devoid of love and were full of jealousy. They went to law with each other, and some were even defiling the worship through their idolatrous practices. The affirmation that such was not a serious concern of the apostle is truly amazing.

Fifth, some Corinthians were denying the Lord's resurrection (1 Cor. 15:12). Is it not amazing also that some do not even consider this sufficient grounds for division—cessation of fellowship? What was Paul's reaction? "Be not deceived: Evil companionships corrupt good morals. Awake to soberness righteously, and sin not; for some have no knowledge of God: I speak *this* to move you to shame" (1 Cor. 15:33-34). What was Paul's attitude toward Hymmenaeus and Philetus, who overthrew people's faith relative to the resurrection (2 Tim. 2:17-18)? Did he mark them? Did he call their names? Did he call on brethren still to fellowship these "children of God"?

Sixth, the Corinthians by their divisions, being carnally minded, were destroying the temple of God, the church, much as were Nadab and Abihu, as observed earlier. What was Paul's reaction? "If any man destroyeth the temple of God, him shall God destroy" (1 Cor. 3:16-17; cf., Eph. 2:20-22). He also rebuked them for differing (1 Cor. 4:7); they were self-deceived (1 Cor. 3:18). They had allowed themselves also to be deceived by false teachers, "For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, fashioning themselves into apostles of Christ...whose end shall be according to their works." (2 Cor. 11:13-15).

PAUL'S REACTION

What was Paul's reaction to the errors? In the first place, he began by trying to correct them, giving them perhaps six months, perhaps a little longer to repent. (Study the amount of time between the two letters to the Corinthians.) He wrote, "What will ye [Will you repent, or not?]? shall I come unto you with a rod [of discipline], or in love and a spirit of gentleness?" (1 Cor. 4:21). Paul's power had been demonstrated with Elymas at Paphos, when he opposed the truth (Acts 13:11); would Corinth suffer similar punishment, or reform their own situation? Paul was ready, if need be, to take stern action.

In the second place, he called for them to withdraw from the man living in adultery (1 Cor. 5). The purpose was to save his soul, to sever the old leaven from the lump, to get back to the "unleavened bread of sincerity and truth." He rebuked them, saying, "Your glorying is not good." If the man refused to repent, he was to be "put away...from among yourselves" (1 Cor. 5:13).

In the third place, he did not write “these things to shame you, but to admonish you as my beloved children” (1 Cor. 4:14). He was concerned with the babes, those weak in faith.

Sufficient to such a one is this punishment which was *inflicted* by the many [when the adulterer in 1 Corinthians 5 was disfellowshipped]; so that contrariwise ye should rather forgive him and comfort him [after he repented], lest by any means such a one should be swallowed up with his overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you to confirm *your* love toward him.

Notice the next statement, “For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye are obedient in all things.” (2 Cor. 2:6-9).

In the fourth place, the Corinthians were to repent of their sins.

For though I made you sorry with my epistle, I do not regret it: though I did regret *it* (for I see that that epistle made you sorry, though but for a season), I now rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye were made sorry unto repentance; for ye were made sorry after a godly sort, that ye might suffer loss by us in nothing. For godly sorrow worketh repentance unto salvation, *a repentance* which bringeth no regret: but the sorrow of the world worketh death (2 Cor. 7:8-10).

Study also verses 11 through 16. Now, what would have been the future of the church at Corinth had these good, loving, tender, irenic unity summit brethren been dealing with the Corinthians? Would they have cleared themselves, as Paul says? Or, would they not rather have remained in their condemned, sinful, damnable state? They had to “Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing” (2 Cor. 6:17).

CONCLUSION

Had they not repented, abandoning their sins, Paul said, “if I come again, I will not spare” (2 Cor. 13:2). “For this cause I [Paul] write these things while absent, that I may not when present deal sharply, according to the authority which the Lord gave me for building up, and not for casting down” (2 Cor. 13:10).

Not only was Paul not defending the division in Corinth, he rebuked them and pleaded with them to come out of their error. The result was that the majority came out—repented. They were earnestly trying to straighten up. Thus, with them, more severe discipline did not have to be forthcoming.

What a contrast this is, though, when one compares: (1) the impenitent attitudes of those who have innovations in their worship, organization, et al., and of those who are in sympathy with fellowshipping these sectarians, and (2) the penitent Corinthians who were willing to come out from their error and reform their lives! What a gross misapplication of Scripture this is, in an attempt to undermine the precious unity which inevitably exists among the obedient!

UNITY MOVEMENTS AND THEIR LESSONS FOR TODAY

W. Wayne Coats



W. Wayne Coats was born and reared in Mississippi. After finishing high school, he enrolled in Freed-Hardeman College. He has graduated from Freed-Hardeman College, David Lipscomb College, Middle Tennessee State University, and the Divinity School of Vanderbilt.

He met Elaine Wright while both were students at Freed-Hardeman. After a few years of courtship, they married. Their home has been blessed with four children. Wayne and Elaine now reside in Mt. Juliet, Tennessee, where they own and operate Mt. Juliet Funeral Home, Mt. Juliet Memorial Gardens, and Mt. Juliet Pet Cemetery.

Wayne is the author of numerous books and is active in writing and preaching and teaching at the local level and in meetings and lectures across the brotherhood.

INTRODUCTION

It will not be the purpose of this study to deal with all of the various efforts to affect some sort of church union during the last two thousand years. This would entail writing large books of history while attempting to deal with, among other things, each of the Ecumenical Councils and their rival Councils. We care not one whit about those old bungled efforts. We are also not concerned with all the balderdash which has emerged within the denominations as they have met together so often and agreed to disagree.

When we speak of “the Church,” we mean not one thing more than the church. If such proves to be confusing to some, thank God I am not responsible for using tongue twisters, sectarian definitions, and hocus-pocus lingo which would add to the accumulated ignorance which already obtains relative to the New Testament church.

If a man has the good sense to know what the New Testament is, with a meager amount of intelligence and a double-portion of common sense and honesty, one can by diligent study arrive at the truth with respect to the church revealed in the Bible. With an attitude other than this, man is hopelessly lost in a morass of confusion.

The church of Christ as revealed in the New Testament is the church to which the saved were added (Acts 2:41, 47). When we do the same thing those people did in the first century, the Lord will add us to the church. We will not be a part of a sect, a cult, or a denomination. We beg, plead, and implore one and all to lay the Bible on the table, read its pages, follow its teachings, and then explain how any person could ever become a part of some sectarian outfit.

While discussing “efforts at unity,” we will confine our study to those events which have transpired down through the years between the Christian Church denominations and some brethren who theoretically represented themselves as members of the church of Christ. Since there have been efforts to achieve unity, such would suggest that somewhere real unity has not existed. Of course this is the problem.

Since there have been some feeble efforts to affect some sort of union, such is a tacit admission that division denotes something isn’t right. If division perchance is wrong, then it should be stomped out. If division is wrong, then those who foster and perpetrate division are dreadfully wrong. Furthermore, if division is wrong, then those who cause division are in grave danger; they need to be identified (Rom. 16:17). Isn’t it a bit weird to think that we are able to know when division is prevalent, but we do not have the good sense to know who is causing division? This is a real problem and borders on dishonesty.

The religious division which prevails between the Christian church and the church of Christ has not always existed. There were no separate churches during the early days of the Restoration era. This is an indisputable fact. The divided state of affairs which culminated in 1906 was the result of a very sorry, warped, liberal, and loose attitude toward the authority of God’s inspired Word. Such liberal attitudes allowed all sorts of innovations to be introduced. Those innovations were but symptomatic of a lack of respect for the Word of God, and that same sorry attitude has now surfaced in the church and can be found among the liberals all over the nation.

Bethany College was founded March 2, 1840, by Alexander Campbell, and its radical influence began to be felt right early as a result of liberal teachers and professors. Some of the professors had attended schools of the modernists and they soaked up the heresies as

if they were sponges and brought back the godless tripe to the Bethany classrooms.

W. K. Pendleton had studied at the University of Virginia beginning in 1836. He later married the daughter of Alexander Campbell and when Bethany College opened in 1841, Pendleton was one of its teachers. In 1845 Pendleton was elected Vice President of the school. In 1846 he became Co-editor of the *Millennial Harbinger*; in 1864 Pendleton became editor of the *Harbinger*, and in 1866 he became President of Bethany College.

It is significant that on October 23, 1849, a convention was held in Cincinnati, Ohio. W. K. Pendleton, the professor, attended the convention. He praised the convention, he prayed, and he spoke saying, "There are some duties of the church which a single congregation cannot by her unaided strength discharge." Pendleton introduced a resolution which read, "Resolved, that the Missionary Society contemplated by this action be presented to the brethren as the chief object of importance among our benevolent enterprises." Thus, the American Christian Missionary Society was sent forth as a perennial curse upon the church of Jesus Christ. W. K. Pendleton made speeches in defense of the Missionary Society in 1866 and in 1874. That the liberal views were championed by Pendleton and the *Harbinger* there can be no doubt. In 1861 Pendleton wrote, "To plead for union, and at the same time exclude the really pious from the communion of the body and blood of the Savior, is in the very nature of things, to destroy the practical power of our plea." This shows the compromising spirit which prevailed at the time.

The sorry, sordid story of instrumental music being introduced in congregations with the resultant discord, divisions, and damnation is available for all who care to do a bit of research.

The die was cast—the devil had succeeded in destroying unity. For around fifty years all hell prevailed against the ancient order. Six of every seven congregations were lost to the Digressive Christian Church in their devilish rough-shod efforts. All the colleges were taken over by the "Progressives," as they were wont to call themselves.

Lawsuits, ill-will, church fusses became the order of the era. Where brethren had been able to dwell together and worship in unity, such unity would vanish when the digressive thieves would enter.

Instead of unity, division would result, and the faithful would usually have to vacate the premises and properties which they had purchased. The liberals had no consciences, ethics, or real character. When people are but tools of the devil, it is folly to try to show them what is wrong from right.

Although the information is a bit lengthy, it is felt that such matters need to be restated not only to show what contributed to division but because we are so prone to forget.

One of the widely publicized court cases came to be known as, "The Sand Creek Church Case." Back in 1874 John Turrentine and his wife deeded some property upon which a church building was to be constructed. A church had been organized at Sand Creek in 1834 when a log building was erected. In 1851 a frame building was constructed, and in 1874 a brick building was erected.

By 1889 trouble had developed within the congregation over instrumental music and the Missionary Society. In August, 1889, Daniel Sommer preached at Sand Creek to several hundred people. He denounced the innovations and declared the need to reject the "Progressives." During this heated August revival the *Sand Creek Declaration* was drawn up and duly signed by various members. A distinction was made in the "Progressives" and the "Conservatives."

An open split occurred in 1904 when thirty members pulled away and began to meet as the "Christian Church of Sand Creek." About one hundred members remained and stubbornly refused to give in and give up the property. Consequently the disgruntled would-be thieves filed suit in the Circuit Court of Shelby County, Illinois. After all the testimony had been given and the attorneys pleas had been made, the Court rendered its decision, saying in part:

Have the defendants departed from the faith? Taking all things into consideration and with no sort of any personal feeling, and from all the evidence submitted and the able arguments of counsel, and with a keen desire to do right in this matter and to follow the law, I must come to the conclusion that they have not. The findings of the Court will be for the defendants. The bill will be dismissed for want of equity.

It would seem very strange to sensible and rational people as to why the Digressives would say that the organ was a mere aid or an expedient but they would destroy unity in every congregation in order to have their aid. Not only so, but they would engage in lawsuits. The

plaintiffs in the Sand Creek case appealed the matter to the Illinois Supreme Court where they also lost the case.

There were not many court cases held insofar as the records reveal. The Digressives could pilfer and steal property because brethren were happy and contented to go along. After all, the cause of Modernism, Liberalism, and Digression moved along under the banner of "Progressivism." That word was appealing, electrifying, denoting great success. It had the same kind of magic sound as the word *change* which is used by modern thieves.

The facts are available and accessible to anyone who cares to persist in hours of relentless research. The roughshod, ruthless, devilish efforts of the Digressives sprang from the hearts of wicked and diabolical people. If this seems severe, then we can produce ample proof of how terribly unchristian in both word and action the Digressives were.

Although division had been perpetuated, proliferated, and vigorously pushed, the public pronouncements were not officially made known until 1906 and years following.

S. N. D. North was the Director of the Federal Bureau of Census and became aware of two diverse religious groups as set forth by the *Gospel Advocate* and the *Christian Standard*. North sought to settle the matter, and in 1907 he visited David Lipscomb at Nashville. As a result Lipscomb, J. W. Shepherd, and others attempted a religious census. The result of all the efforts can be seen in an eventual listing of two diverse religious groups in the Federal Archives. The breach widened as wreck and ruin, havoc and harm continued to spread.

The Digressives found themselves in an internal struggle over Modernism and infidelity. A cleavage eventually developed. They sowed to the wind and reaped the whirlwind when the ultra-liberal Disciples of Christ Denomination developed.

One might be greatly impressed to read of all the many overtures made by the Digressive Christian Church to effect some sort of union. There was never a real effort to achieve Bible unity free from the innovations which had caused division.

There is no denying the fact that Liberalism and its Digressive innovations spread like the plague. The old *Christian Standard* came from the press with Isaac Errett as its Editor. Its purpose was to furnish an organ for the liberal cause. One ongoing feature of the

Standard seemed to be a constant boasting of and bragging about how many preachers and churches were aligning themselves with the Digressives.

Of course, the sorry schemes utilized by the States Missionary Society would not be divulged. It was a practice to try to get the deeds of church property changed over to the State Society. This was plain thievery to decent people. Furthermore, if preachers did not sign up with the Society thieves, they were barred from preaching in certain buildings. I suppose those old fools considered that what they were doing was for the prince of peace.

The conditions which prevailed back then were similar to those which exist presently. The schools had plunged headlong towards hell and destruction and the young preachers had a flair for popularity while the "Progressives" flaunted their popularity. The schools controlled the churches all over the country.

The liberals were growing so fast and boasting about it each week in the *Standard*. They suddenly grew brave, and like Goliath they felt fully capable of destroying all opposition.

In 1898 T. R. Burnett wrote from Texas and declared that finally one had emerged in the person of Clark Braden who was willing to make an attempt in defending instrumental music in debate with brother Joe Warlick. That was a mistake for the Digressive cause.

It is simply amazing that some of the Christian Church preachers made token efforts to defend instrumental music in worship. It might be of interest to note just a few of the debates which occurred. Please be assured that the list is not complete.

Warlick — Braden
Kurfees — Calhoun
Warlick — Stark
Reid — Boaz
Hall — Pendleton
Snygley — Briney

Hall — Walker
Boles — Clubb
Hardeman — Boswell
Wallace — Walker
Wallace — Barber
Wallace — Hunt

M. C. Kurfees has left some information regarding a meeting which was held in Nashville, Tennessee, on Thursday, February 17, 1909. Brother Kurfees reported that he was invited to Nashville to meet with others "to see if we could find common ground on which all can work and worship."

I know not what brother Kurfees and the faithful brethren were thinking. Imagine if you can, meeting with Lin Cane, Pendleton, J. B. Briney, John B. Cowden, McKissick, Doctor Cowden, and R. R. Hamlin. Astute readers of Restoration history know about the above Digressives and their attitudes toward things sacred and eternal.

Meeting with the above Digressives were E. G. Sewell, E. A. Eldin, J. C. McQuiddy, W. T. Boaz, M. C. Kurfees, and Miss Emma Page who served as the stenographer. The group met in the home of Doctor Cowden.

The apostate J. B. Briney made a little proposal in which he envisioned a new work beginning over in a different section of Nashville. M. C. Kurfees and Pendleton would assist in this new work. They would both leave the organ and the Society out of the new work. They would be on “common ground” and thus be united.

Brother Kurfees and the brethren readily accepted the proposal and lauded the idea of “common ground.” Brother McQuiddy raised the point of extending that “common ground” area outward to a million miles. If brethren could find common ground in ten square feet, and such was the proposal, and if unity was the goal, then that “common ground” should extend just as fast as division existed. If not, why not?

The Christian Church liberals squirmed and rejected their own proposal. Without being able to discern the hearts of those fellows, like others who attempted unity efforts in subsequent years, it really seems that they hoped to pull our brethren into some sort of compromising scheme. The meeting adjourned with the Digressives proposing but disposing of any and everything which would even look like the unity of the spirit.

THE COMMISSION ON UNITY

The Digressives were beginning to experience some losses in their movement as a result of the inward squabbles over modernism. If anyone dares to question this statement, then I invite them to read the 1917 issue of the *Christian Standard*. Here can be found the boiling cauldron centering around the modernism, German Rationalism, and infidelity which saturated the College of the Bible in Lexington, Kentucky. Hall L. Calhoun charged that Destructive Criticism was rampant in the school. Many of the students confirmed the charges. Calhoun resigned, and the Board made a whitewash investigation. The whole sordid affair was publicized in almost every issue of the

1917 *Christian Standard*. Young men whose faith had been destroyed quit preaching. Some churches refused to let modernists preach in their pulpits.

Without knowing all the specifics, one could hazard a very good guess as to why “**The Commission on Unity**” was formed by certain Christian Church preachers. In an article published by F. B. Srygley in the May 18, 1922, *Gospel Advocate*, which he titled, “**The Commission on Unity**,” brother Srygley wrote that he had received a letter which he printed as follows:

West Nashville, Tenn.

May 1, 1922

Dear Sir and Brother,

We sent you last year a copy of O. E. Payne’s book on the church music question for your consideration and to be returned after reading. We have not yet received the copy sent you so we are writing to request the return of the same.

Fraternally,

THE COMMISSION ON UNITY

Brother Srygley made some comments about the letter from the Commission. He desired to know who appointed the Commission on Unity. This was a legitimate question. Did the members appoint themselves, or did others appoint them? For whom did the commission members speak? Since the Commission on Unity mailed out the book by O. E. Payne, it should be called “The Commission on Division,” for it certainly helped in splitting congregations.

Brother Srygley pointed out that there had been unity in Nashville on the music question when brethren met together and sang as they worshiped. This was most evident during the Ryman Auditorium Meeting with N. B. Hardeman preaching.

It was noted by brother Srygley that he had never seen a copy of the Payne book; so he just did not know how he could return it, but he would send a copy of M. C. Kurfees’ answer to the Payne book. The Commission on Unity made no reply.

In January, 1928, a Nashville newspaper printed an article titled “Disciples Stress Trend For Unity.” The article announced “The Mid-Winter Conference of the Tennessee Christian Church” would meet in session at Vine Street Christian Church. W. M. Baker of McLemare Avenue Disciples of Christ Church in Memphis would preside. Dr.

Roger T. Nooe and John B. Cowden were to be the speakers. Cowden was quoted as saying, "It is time for Disciples to come back to their first love." He stated, "The greatest barrier to unity is sectarianism and deep-rooted denominational stubbornness." Brother F. B. Srygley wrote a short article in the February 2, 1928, *Gospel Advocate* titled, "Brother Cowden Stresses Unity." With his piercing pen brother Srygley pointed out that the very thing which Cowden and his cohorts were promoting was the thing which Cowden condemned. The meeting, as a mid-winter conference was sectarian and denominational.

THE MURCH-WITTY FIASCO

James DeForest Murch went to Canada to speak at the Old Central Church. Some elder of the church expressed, that with such a wonderful spirit as that which was evident in the meeting, fellowship might be effected between the two groups.

This elder arranged for a meeting between Murch and Claude F. Witty. The two agreed that "something should be done about the scandal of division in the ranks of the Restoration Movement." Tradition, creedalism, provincialism, institutionalism, Pharisaism, extremism, indifference, self-sufficiency, ignorance, proselyting, distrust, and all the imps of Satan were running riot. The leadership of the churches was not calling for unity. There was no great uprising of the rank and file demanding it. Yet we, as a people, had preached it; we ought to practice it.

One would think that the severe changes hurled by Murch and Witty would have been omitted—if they really desired unity. It isn't clear where the two men derived their authority, but headstrong men have no use for authority except that which they can wield. Murch and Witty each made a list of two-hundred men. They arranged to have unity meetings where small groups of men would come together. The first of these "together" meetings was held in Cincinnati, Ohio, on February 23, 1937. There was so much love exuded that those "together" folks had other "together" meetings in Indianapolis, Indiana; Akron, Ohio; Los Angeles, California; Columbus, Indiana; and some other places.

From these unity meetings there was set forth a five-point "Approach to Unity." Please be greatly impressed with how **Unity** was to be effected.

1. Prayer: "Definite private and congregational prayer for unity, seeking the leadership of Christ."
2. Survey: "Seeking to determine how much we have in common in faith and practice."
3. Friendliness: "Establishing individual friendly relations by exchange of fraternal courtesies and through fellowship meetings."
4. Cooperation: "Joint activity in enterprises which will not do violence to personal or group convictions."
5. Study and Discussion: "Open-minded study and humble discussion of the things which at present divide us, in order to discover the way to complete and permanent unity."

I do not see that it would require the wisdom of Solomon to see through the farcical proposals in the five propositions above.

As a result of the two compromising factions getting together, a huge National Unity meeting was conducted May 3-4, 1938, in Detroit where Claude Witty clowning around. Speeches were made by George Benson, H. H. Adamson, and J. N. Armstrong. It would be interesting to know what those three men said, but whatever they said didn't amount to the proverbial hill of beans. There was no unity of the Spirit in that union meeting. In looking again at that five-point program which listed prayer as the first point, it just seems that not one person in those meetings was fit to pray, or else God didn't care to become involved in the mess. Also, regardless of how much they sought the leadership of Christ, it seems that our Lord wasn't interested in coming to the plains of Ono for any kind of union affair.

What were the results of those unity meetings? James DeForest Murch listed the "chief accomplishments" as follows:

1. "A growing personal acquaintance among the brethren of both groups."
2. "A growing in knowledge of the current status of the churches—their teaching, their programs, their problems, their aims and accomplishments."
3. "A frank study and discussion of the obstacles to unity, the impelling motives toward it, and possible methods of achieving it."
4. "Dramatizing and publicizing the five-point approach."

5. "The creation of a spirit of prayer and surrender to God's will as supremely important requisites to any such endeavor."

A paper was started by Murch and Witty which they called *Christian Unity Quarterly*. The paper supposedly was a medium for free discussion about unity. Murch stated that "only the *Christian Leader* and *Word and Work* were openly friendly." "The *Gospel Advocate* was at first violent in its opposition, but later joined with the *Firm Foundation* in studiously ignoring the movement."

"Prayer meetings for unity were held at the graves of Campbell, Stone, and McGarvey," but it seems that the Lord didn't hear those prayers. When the battles began to rage between the Modernists and those who were not, the matter of unity as presented by Murch and Witty came to an end. "Reactionary forces in the Church of Christ rejoiced over the failure of attempts at reconciliation." I would not agree that rejoicing developed over the failure at reconciliation, but there had been opposition from the very beginning of the unity movement simply because brethren knew full-well that Murch and Witty were offering a bogus bill of goods. We will look at some of the opposition which came from the "Reactionary forces" in the churches of Christ.

On November 9, 1937, Claude F. Witty read a paper at a Unity meeting in Columbia, Indiana. He titled his paper "Can We Walk The Wire?" Witty had no conviction whatsoever about instrumental music in worship, leaving the matter to elders in each congregation to decide.

"More Work For Witty" was the title of an article by A. T. Harris which appeared in the *Gospel Advocate* on January 13, 1938. In the article brother Harris gave notice of a Community Communion Service in Dallas, Texas, on Saturday, January 1, at the First Methodist Church. Dr. Floyd Poe of the First Presbyterian Church was Chairman of the event. The ministers who would participate were: Dr. Manton of the First Presbyterian Christian, Dr. Frank of the Central Christian Church (who administered the Elements assisted by ten other ministers), and Dr. Wells of the Christian Church, who **distributed** the elements assisted by seventy-five laymen.

Brother Harris questioned if Claude Witty would "walk with those Christian Church preachers in distributing the elements on Saturday."

He pointed out that the course pursued by Witty was nothing more than compromise. In the February 17, 1938, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, W. E. Brightwell responded to the Witty article. The Brightwell article was titled "He That Is Not With Me." Brother Brightwell showed how Witty was doing not one thing but compromising the truth.

Brother Brightwell stated that the wires as suggested by Witty had already been put to the test by some good religious debates. The plans of Witty "would not rule out open fellowship," said Brightwell. Claude Witty wrote "An Open Letter" to the *Gospel Advocate* which was published March 24, 1938. Brightwell responded by saying that a debate in Detroit would settle the matter. Of course such was not acceptable to the liberal compromisers.

The Digressives knew right well that they would give up not one thing. They also knew that the Unity meeting would result in some brethren compromising what little, if any, convictions they had by participating in those things.

During 1938 the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* were filled with articles dealing with the matter of compromise and unity. In March 1938 brother G. C. Brewer received an invitation to attend some sort of unity meeting. He wrote his feelings about the matter in an article titled "The Conference On Unity," which was printed in the *Gospel Advocate* on March 3, 1938. Brewer explained that some meetings had already been held where brethren talked about unity, but a really big, super unity meeting was scheduled to be held in Detroit, Michigan, during the first week in May 1938. This big gala affair was to be sponsored by James DeForest Murch of the *Christian Standard* and Claude F. Witty of the Westside Central Church of Christ in Detroit. The Unity meeting was to be held in an effort "to restore fellowship between the Digressives and the antis." Brother Brewer had the good sense to write, "I have declined the invitation. I do not expect to attend."

Brother Brewer wrote that he did not refuse to attend the Unity Conference because the purpose of the occasion was unscriptural. He believed it was good to discuss any and all issues which divide people religiously. G. C. Brewer knew full well that the basic issues would not be discussed when compromisers arranged conferences.

Brother Brewer did not attend the conference because “somebody might think he would compromise the truth.” He wrote, “The situations and our enthusiasm for unity which would be stirred up by the meeting, might cause us to discount the causes of division.” This is exactly what happens in all such conferences. The causes of division are discounted, and not one thing of value occurs. Brother Brewer stated that he did not refuse to go to Detroit because he was afraid of criticism.

It is interesting that G. C. Brewer wrote that, if he attended such a Unity Conference, he could not represent anybody in that meeting but himself, and he did not need any representing. Since he was no part of a denomination, he could not officially represent any denomination. If he agreed on any matter, brother Brewer said that he could not pledge that any other person on earth would accept his decision. Also whatever might be agreed on in Detroit, no congregation on earth would be bound by the agreements.

If the Unity Conference was to be a delegate convention, then the delegates could represent congregations. The entire scheme seemed to be much ado about nothing.

The issue continued to be bandied about as the articles in the old *Gospel Advocate* disclose. Those were days when men had deep convictions; they refused to compromise and sell out to the devil.

In the May 5, 1938, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, John W. Kurfes wrote an open letter to Claude Witty. He took Witty to task for his compromising position.

In the June 2, 1938, *Gospel Advocate*, Cecil B. Douthit wrote an article titled “The Unity Movement.” The article was highly critical of Witty and his efforts. In the June 9, 1938, *Gospel Advocate*, F. B. Srygley wrote his views about “The Detroit Unity Meeting.” Srygley knew exactly why the Digressives would like to have those meetings and con some of the preachers to attend.

Eugene S. Smith discussed “The Unity Movement” in a June 30, 1938, article in the *Gospel Advocate*. He raised the question as to why the Digressives had become concerned about unity. He mentioned that there had been a number of debates in which the Christian Church had lost; so now they wanted to try other tactics. Smith pointed out that James DeForest Murch was a premillennialist. Of course, it made no

sense at all to enter into a unity conference with Digressive premillennialist.

Hugo McCord contributed to the matter in his article on November 5, 1938, which he titled "Koltenbah Speaks Plainly." E. C. Koltenbah had written a severe article about the Murch-Witty Conference. He had come out of Digression and declared that he saw much evil in the affair. He also stated that the entire effort was saturated with premillennialism.

E. C. Koltenbah pointed out that unity is possible only where the pure gospel is preached. Unity can be had by surrendering every unscriptural practice. It was emphasized that once there were "no two sides." "The Cowden Repercussion" was the title of an article written by David H. Bobo and printed December 8, 1938, in the *Gospel Advocate*. John B. Cowden of West Nashville had published a tract titled *Moses or Ishmael*. In the tract the cowardly Cowden, like all liberals, stood afar and at a safe distance, as he attacked the preaching of brother N. B. Hardeman in the recent Ryman Auditorium meeting.

Cowden demonstrated great courage in his tract as he lampooned "legalism." The kind of preaching which was characteristic of the Ryman meeting was "legalistic." Another feature of the Hardeman meeting was its militancy. Cowden condemned militancy in others, but, of course, if he could hide somewhere and write a tract, he could become very militant.

Among other things which John B. Cowden could not tolerate were debates. Students of history know quite well why Cowden did not like debates. Like other Christian Church preachers, they learned that debating would not help their cause.

Cowden declared that following the Hardeman-Boswell debate the Christian Church had tried to keep them going. The Digressives did suggest a debate in Franklin, Tennessee, but this was refused because there was no Christian Church in Franklin. Our brethren were not fools.

In the same December 8, 1938, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*, F. B. Srygley wrote a piece titled "John B. Cowden In Print Again." Brother Srygley pointed out that Cowden was not happy with the way N. B. Hardeman preached. Cowden declared that Hardeman was a "legalist like Moses." He stated that N. B. Hardeman was like Ishmael, "every man's hand was against him." This was hardly the case when over six thousand people came to hear the prince of

preachers. Of course, liberals have never been known for their honesty.

Cowden heard someone say that Hardeman is the Moses of today, and, of course, he felt impelled to refute the idea. It was pointed out by brother Srygley that John B. Cowden helped split the Church in Columbia, Tennessee, by starting a Digressive church. As a member of "The Commission on Unity," Cowden helped scatter the book by O. E. Payne on instrumental music.

Brother H. Leo Boles attended the Murch-Witty Unity Conference in Indianapolis, Indiana, on May 3, 1939, at the invitation of Claude F. Witty. He spoke for one and one-half hours in a very firm manner. He declared how division developed, how it had progressed and especially how the Christian Church had become another denomination, as admitted by some of its own writers.

Brother Boles stressed the necessity of following the Word of God as the only way to have unity. He declared, "You know where you left the Churches of Christ, hence you know where to find them. Come back and unity is the inevitable result."

Instead of anyone standing forth to meet brother Boles, a few decided to make some comments with the pen.

A. T. DeGroot wrote in the *Christian Evangelist*, "The strongest language employed at the conference other than in the expected warmth of some of the exchanges in the open forums, came in the address of H. Leo Boles of Nashville, Tennessee."

The editor of the *Christian Standard* made some side-swipes against the speech of brother Boles. These were printed in the June 3, 10, and 17, issues of the *Standard*. Beginning with the August 3, 1939, issue of the *Gospel Advocate* and following for some few issues, brother Boles answered the *Christian Standard* articles.

Brother W. L. Totty wrote:

H. Leo Boles spoke for one hour and 30 minutes. He told them in no uncertain terms what had caused the division and what it would take to bring about unity. If they expected a compromise, they were mistaken. Perhaps no greater address has been given since the Restoration, especially at a time when they were attempting to win us by smooth sayings.

Brother H. Leo Boles wrote an article which he called, "The Unity Fiasco." The article appeared in the April 10, 1940, issue of the *Gospel Advocate*. Brother Boles related how he received a letter from

James DeForest Murch. The letter stated that Murch was selecting “a few men of prominence in the Churches of Christ to whom he could submit a plan by which the Christian Church and the Churches of Christ could be united.” Brother Boles wrote, “There was no plan except the New Testament that would be considered by any of the prominent brethren in Churches of Christ.”

Murch continued to fish around for two years for those prominent brethren who were willing to meet on the plains of Ono. He finally caught Claude F. Witty, and their plan was to meet in different cities with a few select brethren who would court each other. These fellows had about a half dozen courtships before they came out in the open and told what they were doing.

Brother Boles declared that Witty helped Murch in a scheme to catch members of the church. Murch and the Christian Church gave up nothing; so why go join in with a denomination?

Cowden was but another voice among the early liberals when he said that part of the Restoration Movement, which came to be known as the Church of Christ, came into existence by fighting the sects. When the Ryman Auditorium meeting was planned, the Christian Church sent money to help pay expenses. The brethren did not keep the money and returned it to the senders. That did not make John B. Cowden happy.

Cowden wrote that N. B. Hardeman misrepresented the facts when he said that it was originally agreed to debate all over the country. The truth is that brethren agreed to hold debates only where both sides had church representation.

A notice appeared in the *Gospel Advocate* which mentioned a “National Unity Meeting.” The meeting was scheduled to be held in Lexington, Kentucky, on May 7-8, 1940. The meeting was to be conducted by the Hanover and Cramer Avenue Church of Christ which would host the meeting. O. A. Trinkle and Homer Rutherford would serve the meeting as joint chairmen. E. L. Jorgenson and Frank C. Huston would direct the music. Claude F. Witty was scheduled to deliver the closing address. It needs to be emphasized that the Digressives could feel right at home with Witty and a premillennial church in Lexington, Kentucky.

It needs to be emphasized further that on January 9, 1941, brother H. Leo Boles wrote that a survey of the articles published will show

“that the Advocate has opposed the attempted efforts to unite the Churches of Christ with the Christian Church or Disciples Church.” Was the position of the *Gospel Advocate* the correct one in opposing the unity efforts? Brother Boles continued:

A persistent and consistent opposition toward compromising with the Christian Church has been made. The Churches of Christ have nothing to yield or give up. They occupy the firm ground of New Testament teaching and practice. To oppose compromising is to oppose these unity meetings.

I do earnestly hope and pray that the reader will not tire of the multiple references quoted from the pages of the old *Gospel Advocate*. It has been my plan and purpose to show the opposition given by various faithful writers—to the compromising Murch-Witty Unity Movement. The editor of the *Gospel Advocate* printed numerous editorials. In 1938 alone, the pages of the *Gospel Advocate* were filled with strong opposition to the Unity movement. We need to keep this fact in mind as we view the Joplin Summit and Restoration Forums. What a difference! If the Murch-Witty affair was a “fiasco,” then what was the DeWalt-Cloyd affair? Instead of rising to the occasion and condemning the entire mess, the editor of the *Gospel Advocate* actually participated in the unholy alliance. What a difference! What a contrast! What a shameful, sorry effort at compromising!

James DeForest Murch wrote “A Patchwork of And a Medley of a Forgotten Unity Proposal.” This patchwork was set forth under several items. In item one he wrote, “The discussion of the music and missionary issues is interminable and to no constructive purpose.” In item two Murch wrote, “The primary task of the Church is to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ for the saving of souls; the current discussion hinders this work.”

Item three stated, “The use of musical instruments as an aid to worship is an innovation but not a crime.” Item four declared, “Both those who use and those who oppose instrumental music are Christian brethren holding a common faith.” Item five asserted, “The polity of the New Testament Church precludes the disfellowship of Christian congregations, and therefore division of the body of Christ.”

Item six stated, “Individual congregations should be free to determine their own policy in these controverted matters. Individual Christians should be free to associate themselves with congregations and groups of their own choice.” Item seven averred, “Since the turmoil

over these issues hinders the primary task of the Church, and no matter of faith is involved, both groups should cease their strife and address themselves to the preaching of the gospel.”

Brother Boles answered the Murch sophistry in an article titled “Proposal of Unity Summarized.” One word describes the Murch items and that is—inconsistency. It is so glaring that even a person blind to the truth should be able to see how Murch side-steps the one and only issue, which is authority.

A Christian Church in Los Angeles, California, proposed some sort of unity meeting and invited brother John Allen Hudson to help in the affair. He sent an article to the *Gospel Advocate* titled “Unity Meeting Declined.” The article was published in the April 3, 1941, *Gospel Advocate*. In his reply brother Hudson frankly stated that the effort was not a unity meeting simply because a discussion of the differences between right and wrong would not be allowed. Moreover, before there could be unity, the Digressives would of necessity have to remove all the innovations, and there could not by any degree of compromise.

It is highly significant that John Allen Hudson agreed with so many faithful brethren when he declared, “Respect for authority is the issue.” Instead of crawling over to unity meetings with the Christian Church, brother Hudson proposed a debate of the real issues. There is a vast difference in conditions which obtain today and the conditions which existed in the forties. Back then most all of our preachers were able to see very clearly what the real issue was. Today the woods are full of blind preachers who have not the faintest idea that the main issue is still authority.

The Christian Church had nothing to lose and a lot to gain when it could find a gang of compromises to help them. C. R. Elerich wrote to the *Gospel Advocate* and explained about the “Columbus, Ohio Unity Meeting.” The meeting was to be at the Indianola Church of Christ, but such was a Digressive Christian Church, as explained by brother Elerich. The brother wrote to clarify an announcement by Claude F. Witty lest some might interpret the remarks by Witty to believe the Indianola Church was a sound church. Such was not the case. The pastor of the church was W. R. Walker of the Christian Church persuasion. “No loyal congregation in Columbus was consulted and no loyal preacher was invited.” This shows the conniving, compro-

misgiving, deceptive, chicanery as practiced by men such as Claude Witty. That evil spirit still runs through the hearts of liberals, and they must be exposed.

As an addendum brother B. C. Goodpasture wrote, "Any scheme of union which ignores the causes of division is foredoomed to failure. The Churches of Christ occupy the ground upon which they stood before the division came."

The compromising, apologetic, Claude F. Witty demonstrated complete stupidity more than once, but his weakness was most glaring when he assumed that he could cross swords with H. Leo Boles. Back on April 10, 1941, brother Boles had written an article which he called, "The Unity Fiasco." Claude Witty did not like the article so in cahoots with James DeForest Murch a letter was sent to the *Gospel Advocate* on April 17, 1941. Witty gave a dictionary definition of *fiasco*. He said the word meant, "an ignominious failure." He stated that *ignominious* meant shameful, dishonorable, infamous, despicable. Witty asked, "Has the Advocate gone on record as opposing the unity of baptized believers." His closing remark was, "The Unity Movement moves forward."

The above statements show the absurdity of thought as expressed by the liberals. Brother Boles made a reply to Witty and stated that *fiasco* means a complete or ridiculous failure, as of a play. It was emphasized that the *Gospel Advocate* opposed the Murch-Witty Unity Meeting scheme, but it does not oppose New Testament unity, and there is a difference in the two concepts. There is a vast difference in a union of sects and the unity of the Spirit. The Murch-Witty plan was nothing more than a denominational plan for union. When such groups met, they would decide to uphold denominational division. Brother Boles asked, "Brother Witty, what will the Christian Church have to give up before you will unite with it? Show us how to unite with the Christian Church and quit piddling around with 'annual conventions.'"

Sound and faithful brethren and congregations would have nothing to do with Murch and Witty; so they found running mates among the premillennialists. "The Murch-Witty Unity Plan" was the title of an article by brother Boles as printed in the August 7, 1941, *Gospel Advocate*. Don Carlos Janes was a big operator among the premillennialists in Louisville, Kentucky. A unity meeting was plan-

ned in Louisville, and S. S. Lappan of the Christian Church would be the preacher for the Janes Premillennial Church.

Brother Boles correctly stated that this was an example of the kind of unity proposed by the Murch-Witty plan. It was compromise to the core.

The *Gospel Advocate* was relentless in opposing and exposing the Murch-Witty affair. In advertising "The Unity Convention," the picture of Claude Witty was placed at the top of the advertisement. Brother Boles countered that the unity affair was between a premillennial Christian Church and a premillennial so-called church of Christ. "No loyal church would host the affair." Murch had written how "some of the younger preachers were beginning to think independently of the older editors." Brother Boles said he had helped train over 1,500 preachers and they would not betray the Lord. In March, 1942, there appeared an article by brother Boles titled "Straw Fifteen and Some of the Younger Ministers." This was in response to an article which Murch had written in the *Christian Standard* which he called "Straws In the Wind."

The thoughts of some of the younger preachers were printed in response to the Murch article. A. E. Emmons, Buford Holt, J. A. McNutt, Allen Phy, and C. A. Norred took the Murch-Witty affair to the woodshed.

The Unity Movement continued to be emphasized by James DeForest Murch; so another article was published in the *Advocate* titled "Counting the Straws: Horse Cane, Kentucky." Murch had stated that the church of Christ in Horse Cane, Kentucky, was in fellowship with the Unity Movement. But he did not tell people that the Horse Cane Church was a premillennial church. The *Gospel Advocate* article informed people that the Horse Cane members had signed a petition declaring fellowship with the Christian Churches at Cane City, Glasgow, Hiseville, Smiths Grove, Bowling Green, and elsewhere. These churches used instrumental music and supported the Missionary Society. Why Murch would leave the impression that the Horse Cane Church of Christ was a sound, faithful congregation was best known to himself. None of the sound churches were in fellowship with the premillennial church at Horse Cane.

With reference to the article "Straws in the Wind" by James DeForest Murch, which was printed in the *Christian Standard*, he

very carefully selected fifteen straws which were good signs of a more favorable sentiment toward the Christian Church upon the part of members of the church of Christ. Straw seven could be seen blowing in the wind as more congregations of the church of Christ were using the *Christian Standard* Sunday School literature. Straw eight was really blowing in the breezes when members of the church of Christ were purchasing and reading books by *Christian Standard* writers. Straw nine was floating in the breezes quite rapidly as congregations of the church were purchasing the *Christian Standard* song books. Other straws were mentioned by Murch, but they were petty. The Murch effort could be described as being similar to a drowning man grasping for straws.

In order to assist in the Unity Movement, Murch and Witty started printing a magazine which they called *Unity Quarterly*. In the second issue of the paper, O. P. Spiegel wrote commending the paper. He said that if a subject was not laid down specifically in the New Testament, the matter should be left to the majority of the congregation. Brother J. Roy Vaughan responded to the Spiegel article in the *Gospel Advocate* in a piece which he titled "The Unity Movement and O. P. Spiegel."

When Murch and Witty began their compromising *Unity Quarterly*, O. P. Spiegel read the first issue and sent in his commendations. It is strange that a *Unity Quarterly* would condone a Democratic vote on matters when the church of Christ is not a Democracy. This is not unity but compromise. There are New Testament principles to guide us in matters, and we must not reject such principles.

On instrumental music, Spiegel said he would follow the majority. He compared the organ to other aids such as notes in a hymn book. This position is puerile on the very face of it. Such would allow innovations commensurate with the ignorance of people.

Brother Vaughan asked why Spiegel started an organ church in Montgomery when a large non-organ church was near by. Was Spiegel concerned about what the majority wanted? Spiegel represented another lying liberal.

In days gone by "the organ folks ran roughshod over humble brethren. Then they tried debates." "Now they try the *Unity Quarterly* affair."

I have attempted to trace in chronological order the squabbles which developed as a result to the unity movement of Murch and Witty. If the many articles and dates become tedious, please remember that there is a purpose in all those listings. I have tried to show the undaunted courage, conviction, and uncompromising attitude of good brethren connected with the old *Gospel Advocate* as they stood like giants on the walls of Zion ready to meet the Digressive foe at every point.

After all those unity meetings, conferences, Quarterlies, and compromise, one might well ask what progress was made. What was accomplished? **Absolutely nothing!**

Sensible brethren do not need to know all about the unity movements in order to stand fast and refuse to compromise. We can make some comparisons between the spineless, liberal, apologetic people in days gone by and the same kind of folks today who will sell the Savior for brass shields.

UNITY-IN-DIVERSITY

When brother Roy J. Hearn asked me to speak on “Unity in Diversity” at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectureship, I was dumbfounded. Everyone needs to feel and be found dumb, if one agrees to speak on a subject concerning which one knows absolutely nothing.

I knew for a fact that I had studied every book in the Bible, but I found not the slightest hint of an idea about anything called Unity-in-Diversity. I was aware of the fact that if brother Hearn knew anything about Unity-in-Diversity, I could also know about it. Insofar as I knew or could find out, not one piece had been written in any of the papers about the matter.

As time passed and research continued, it was found that Carl Ketcherside (without a doubt no greater heretic has arisen in our generation) had been to Europe, had slurped at the trough with English theologians, and then he returned to America full of the foolishness of Unity-in-Diversity.

Ketcherside wrote a few books in which he championed the view of Unity-in-Diversity. In reality, in fact and in act, and from a scriptural perspective, there is no such thing as unity in diversity. The entire concept is an afterthought espoused by the far-out modernistic theologians and copied by several of our liberal professors and preachers. An ecumenical spirit develops within the liberal mind, and

they borrow the Ketcherside crutch, which he borrowed from men whose understanding of the New Testament church is as blank as a June bug.

The ridiculous idea of unity in diversity can be equated with modern Protestantism in its sham and shameful episodes to “agree to disagree.” Agreement is unity, albeit it may be (and sometimes is) agreement in error. Disagreement is not unity and can never be. There is no such thing as “agreement in disagreement.” The split second people come to agreement, then disagreement disappears. If disagreement continues among a group, then all the denials in the world will not change the matter.

One of the most moronic ideas ever advanced is that we just ought to admit that unity exists. One of the forum speakers actually stated that unity already existed between the Christian Church and the church of Christ; so “we need to admit it.” This is the sort of warped mentality which is evident in some of our wrong-headed brethren. Pray tell, what loss would be sustained if such shallow, thoughtless, excuses went out from us? Marvin Phillips keeps babbling that there is about 80 to 85 percent agreement between the Christian Church and the church of Christ. That proves not one thing insofar as Bible unity is concerned. Such thinking is much less than real thinking.

Unity denotes harmony. The trouble with liberals, among other things, is that they are tone-deaf to the Word of God. For some years I sang as a member of a quartet, and we put great emphasis upon harmony. Can you imagine someone trying to sing with a real good harmonious quartet but only getting 80% of the notes, chords, and sounds correct? Such is liberal harmony or unity! The liberal sound is a monotone, without harmony, senseless, moronic.

Where there is Bible unity there is concord, not discord. Whatever claims are made for unity in diversity, there is forever discord. The very idea of diversity—to sensible thinking people—denotes dissonance, discrepancy, incongruity, opposition, disparity, variance, disarray, and disunion. Diverse ideas are inharmonious, conflicting, clashing, dissenting, divergent, mismatched, irregular, irregular, deranged, and opposite.

The One Body, Restoration Forum folks apparently think that they can hood-wink a lot of people. They clamor for unity-in-diversity. They like to give all sorts of illustrations from nature to try to boost

their case. Will they accept the illustration of a symphony orchestra where everyone plays in discordant notes 20 % of the time? There is diversity, but who will accept it? Will the liberal forum folks compare their concert to a mighty chorus where the singers are on key only 80% of the time? Ah, but there is Diversity. That mighty unity in diversity chorus gathers together and the decibels reach the greatest power as the performers yell, shout, scream, roar, howl, wail, whimper, groan, bawl, whoop, bellow, screech, shriek, squeak, squeal, bark, yelp, growl, bray, bleat, moo, croak, quack, cluck, buzz, and blather. Such marvelous diversity and unity! Think not the description is overly dramatic. No indeed! We are defining unity-in-diversity set forth by Phillips, et. al.

I urge and insist that the readers take notice as to how the Unity-in-Diversity fellows attempt to set forth their position. They will give a lot of illustrations from the natural realm which on the very face of the matter is completely absurd. I can give many illustrations from nature which will show that the liberals should be cannibals and devour each other. It is a poor cause which depends on Unity-in-Diversity for its hopes.

THE JOPLIN SUMMIT RESTORATION FORUMS AND UNITY MOVEMENTS

Those who make it an important part of their lives to keep abreast of matters are not in dismal darkness regarding the modern fiasco which happened at Joplin, Missouri, along with its subsequent disgraceful compromising efforts. These are matters which must not be forgotten.

It would seem that some brethren can learn a little in less than a lifetime whereas other brethren just don't seem to learn anything. With all the efforts expended back in former days when Murch and Witty were having their heyday, it would be in order to ask how much unity resulted. There was a great amount of make-believe, play-like, subterfuge, and hullabaloo happenings. The Digressives gave up not one thing. They were fishing for suckers and found a few.

From August 7-9, 1984, a "Restoration Summit" was conducted on the campus of Ozark Bible College in Joplin, Missouri. The meeting was planned in part by Alan Cloyd and Dennis Randall who worked with the Vultee Church in Nashville. Also, Don DeWelt and Ken Idleman of the Independent Christian Church helped plan the affair.

DeWelt was the President of College Press, and Idleman was President of Ozark Bible College.

The affair would rival some of the great church Councils of Centuries gone by, according to the compromisers; to others the event will go down in infamy, which is where it belongs.

There were numerous reports of the Summit Conference in papers, and one can surmise who gave the event good and favorable reports.

Since there were two sides separated before the summit, there were also two sides separated after the event. Those of my brethren who bothered to go to Joplin might tell us exactly what they accomplished. The format of the fiasco consisted of one-hundred men selected by the planners. There were fifty men from the Independent Christian Church and also fifty of us which included men who rode the range all the way from a few conservative brethren, to a crew of wild, liberal, modernistic, infidels who had no more interest in representing the conservative church of Christ than a June bug.

I sincerely believe that, as a part of recorded history, we need to forever keep this list before us. It does carry a significant message. Here is the list of men who were selected to attend the 1984 Summit Conference at Joplin, Missouri, from the church of Christ.

Carl Allison	R. W. Gray	Michael Moore
John Alexander	Baxter Graves	Gary Morrison
Richard Bagget	Monroe Hawley	Joe Munday
James O. Baird	Bob Hendren	Hardeman Nichols
Bob Barnhill	Robert Hooper	John Payne
Al Behel	Jon Jones	Marvin Phillips
Reese Bryant	Richard Jones	Mike Price
Bill Clary	Alvin Jennings	Dennis Randall
Charles Clodfelter	Dalton Key	Rubel Shelly
Alan Cloyd	Wayne Kilpatrick	Philip Slate
Carroll Ellis	Lawrence Knowlton	William Smith
Ian Fair	Neil Lawrence	J. J. Turner
Everett Ferguson	Reuel Lemmons	Bob Ubelhor
John Fisk	Sam Long	Keith Wallace
Harvey Floyd	Randy Mayeaux	Calvin Warpula
Sid Fulford	Maurice Meredith	Keith Whitney
David Gotcher	Bill Minick	Roy Young

It would be honest to state that not all of the men selected actually attended the conference. In looking over the list, a feeling of utter disgust wells up in any sound and faithful member of the Church. To

think that a gang of liberal renegades would represent the truth of my God is deplorable. Cloyd and Randall were about as qualified to select men for the conference as Liz Taylor would be to speak on morality.

It is highly significant that of those selected by DeWelt and Idleman fourteen of the men were affiliated with colleges operated by the Christian Church. In several issues of *Contending for the Faith* articles appeared from various brethren in which the Joplin Summit was discussed. Victor Eskew wrote, "A Review In Review" in the January, 1985 paper in which he gave a review of a review by Rubel Shelly who praised the summit. Brother Eskew pointed out four things which Shelly said the summit was not. (1) It was not a merger attempt, (2) It was not an exercise in compromise, (3) It was not a symposium-debate on instrumental music, and (4) It was not a brawl. A rejoinder to the Shelly assertions was effectively made by brother Eskew. Please remember that the occasion was a unity meeting. The affair was not held in order to divide the two groups. It is of little consequence what Shelly wrote. Like Reuel Lemmons, he can be on all different sides of an issue at the same time. Not one thing would have caused greater joy for Don DeWelt and Alan Cloyd than for some of the men to merge—like Judas and the soldiers.

Every Unity Movement which has ever happened has been a compromise effort. The name *Shelly* is synonymous with compromise. What in the name of reason would a man need to say or write in order to be guilty of compromise, other than what Shelly has said?

The summit was "not a debate on instrumental music." Of course not! That would be the last thing in the world to present at a compromising conference. Instrumental music was one of the things which brought about division; so why skirt the issue! Why waste time at some nebulous meeting with a group of men who will not address the main issues? Unity meetings are nothing more than a farce. There was no brawl at the summit because most everyone was of such an irenic spirit. There were no "knuckleheads" invited.

Please note that brother Eskew gives some further information from Shelly who declared "meaningful exchange can take place between the two groups of believers." "We can—interchange speakers." "It would be wonderful to worship together and to have some pulpit exchange."

In the February, 1985 *Contending for the Faith*, Roger Jackson addressed the subject, "A Contribution to Unity." Brother Jackson pointed out that Unity-in-Diversity is not the answer, but such is what DeWalt and others were seeking. There can never be unity apart from the Word of God.

In the same issue of the paper brother Dub McClish filled five and one-half pages discussing, "Reflections On the Restoration Summit." Our brother gives a detailed exposé of the first Unity Conference at Joplin. The background of the affair is discussed and a review of some of the speeches is given.

Monroe Hawley spoke on: "History and Current Profile of Churches of Christ." As the liberals are want to do, Hawley prattled about the "sectarian" spirit among folks in the church of Christ. Why would he do this? Ah, but the Christian Church preachers would gloat over this. Hawley would collect his thirty pieces of silver for certain.

Brother McClish dealt with the Hawley prattle that only a "small vocal minority" in the church were contentious. It is not being contentious to berate others who are contentious if one is a liberal—liberals never make any sense.

Hawley was followed by "heh, heh, heh," Furman Kearley, who spoke on "Exegesis and Hermeneutics as they Relate to the Unity Question." Brother McClish wished that Kearley

had used this great opportunity to emphasize the authority of the silence of the scripture and the scriptural law of exclusion by positive command as these laws relate to the instrument and to missionary organizations.

Kearley did not do this, and McClish was wishing too much to even think that Kearley would face up to his duty. One Claude Witty in the church is already too many.

Brother McClish commended the speech given by Hardeman Nichols on "Authority: Where Does It End?" Nichols presented his case quite effectively, but "the application to these issues could have and should have been much more pointed and specific, in my judgment," as stated by brother McClish. I do not think brother Nichols converted very many of the Digressive preachers.

The final major speaker was brother Reuel Lemmons whose topic was "Where Can/Where Do We Go From Here?" I said it while brother Reuel was alive, and it is not amiss to say it again. One would

never know how many directions brother Lemmons would go in just one speech. He was an expert at switching positions, especially when he hob-nobbed with any of the liberals.

In discussing the Lemmons speech, brother McClish informs us that Reuel

implied that the issues which divide us are really only matters of personality and opinion by calling them “spite fences,” which we have built “sky high.” It was a sleazy compromise effort to charge faithful brethren with being “sectarian.”

I have eighteen ducks on the lake behind my house, and every last one of them quacks exactly alike. Please take notice of how the liberal, compromising, apologizing characters blow and quack alike regarding “sectarians.” I just never did fear “sectarians” or run and hide in some safe place when those boogers came around. It has to be that liberals live in mortal fear of those lowly creatures whom they so flipantly demean as “sectarians.”

Lemmons decreed that unity already existed between the two born again groups. They just need to acknowledge it. It has become well known that Alan Cloyd objected to having the tract of brother H. Leo Boles speech on display, which was given at the May 3, 1939 unity affair in Indianapolis. In irenic fashion Cloyd apologized for the presence of the Boles tract. He averred that “it was perhaps reprinted by someone who does not understand the distinction between the Independent Christian Churches and the Disciples of Christ.”

Cloyd wrote:

I did in fact remove the tracts in question. They were uninvited materials which were not appreciated. Brother Boles’ language is abusive and crude. I did not feel that these tracts would be in the best interest of the meeting.

Cloyd continued, “Those who ignorantly distribute such tracts apparently are not aware that the Christian Church has in fact done 2 of the 3 things Boles called for.”

To know something of the excessive, shallow, thoughtless, absurd, mind-set of a few of the compromisers who had to say something, brother McClish gives a few quotes. From Randy Mayeaux we read, “But we each learned of the integrity, the sincerity, the true but honest difference of opinion.” Integrity? The joke of the year is for Mayeaux to write about integrity.

He has long since left the church, the truth, the way of righteousness, and started his own cultic outfit. Such is the timber from which to build a summit.

Calvin Warpula wrote, "The Reformers asked, 'In whom do you believe, not what do you believe!'" Calvin quoted Hawley who stated, "We are generally more committed to the Bible than to Christ and the two are not the same." If one has a gut disposed to accept liberal gas, then such offerings as given by Hawley and Warpula might be acceptable.

One of the disgraceful, despicable, demeaning, compromising, apologetic events at the unity meeting was the huddle of Furman Kearley and Wayne Kilpatrick. In their little plan we note their strategy.

Kearley: "If we could start in our congregations doing some more studies in Restoration history outside our own branch and look at the distinctions between the conservative instrumentalists and the Christian Church...[sentence unfinished].

Kilpatrick: "I wonder, too, if bringing Christian Church preachers in for a class like this might be good. Let them come in and tell their history in a class situation. I think you could ease from the class to the pulpit."

Kearley: "Right! And you could get by with telling history."

Kilpatrick: "Yeah."

Kearley: "whereas if they were telling doctrine—heh, heh, heh."

Kilpatrick: "And while they are telling history, they could tell enough doctrine to let us know that, hey, we believe alike—so much of it. So that may be a beginning point: in the classroom."

There has never been a more deceitful, dishonest, conniving, reprehensible, cowardly plan perpetrated against the church of Christ, since old Judas betrayed our Lord. He did have the decency to go hang himself, whereas Kearley and Kilpatrick are content to hang on.

Readers of the DeWelt paper will be impressed with Furman Kearley's article: "Receive one another as Christ received us. A call for unity that we must not ignore." Why would Don DeWelt or Victor Knowles ask Kearley to write an article for their paper? They knew exactly which person to ask. They also knew that they would get an article which would bother not one soul in the Christian Church.

The truth is: Kearley missed the entire thrust of Romans 14 when he tried to compromise with the Digressives. Had he looked at one

simple phrase in the passage, he would not be so eager to fraternize with the Christian Church. Inspiration declared, "Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God" (Rom. 15:7). If we can ever figure out when and how Christ receives men, such will forever silence such men as Kearley who would like for the Digressives and faithful brethren to "receive one another." Furman Kearley writing for the Christian Church Digressive Denominational paper is but another example of a misguided brother who felt that he had to say something instead of having something to say.

James W. Boyd wrote an article which he called, "Shall We Bow To The Summit?" He very carefully warned brethren about the specious dangers of the unity efforts.

In the March issue of *Contending For The Faith*, Ira Rice set forth five things which Marvin Phillips had written for Don DeWalt's *One Body*, and which Marvin advocated in order to unite the Church of Christ and the Christian Church.

1. Local brethren, instrumental and non-instrumental, need to meet and get better acquainted.
2. Joint sessions such as at preachers luncheons could be held for food, getting better acquainted, and listening to a good lesson, and possible discussion.
3. Agree to speak at any gathering where your conscience will allow. We only make progress when we reach out.
4. We need more sessions where our people get to know where the other group is coming from. We will do this by hearing their men speak their convictions.
5. Don't be negative. If you don't like this plan, then attempt one you believe in. This effort was backed by prayer and preparation. It represents our best efforts at reaching an end of hostilities between brethren who really want to be "One in Christ" together.

The above palaver of Phillips shows how to end hostilities. Get rid of all conviction, sell out to the devil, compromise the truth, and crawl in bed with every heretic who can smile.

A very timely article by brother Lester Eugene Walp, Sr., appeared in *Contending For The Faith* in April, 1985. Brother Walp titled his article "Unity of Fellowship: Church of Christ and Christian Church." He made mention of the fact that he had been a devout member of the

Christian Church and had taught in Sunday school for many years. He became heart-sick at the lack of Bible teaching and preaching which prevailed in the Christian Church. He and his wife obeyed the gospel and of course rejected the liberalism of the Christian Church Denomination.

Brother Walp does not see any way for unity to be attained with the “lovers of worldly things and the indifferent who remain in the Christian Church.”

It doesn't get through the thick heads of the compromising liberals just exactly why there can be no fellowship with the Digressives. It is crystal clear to brother Walp and many other brethren who have left the Digressive Denomination as to why there can be no fellowship with any system of errors. Think about this.

Brother Harrell Davidson titled his article “Unity—The Joplin Summit,” and the article was published in the April, 1985 *Contending For The Faith*. Our good brother discussed some of the events of the Joplin Summit and pointed out that Alan Cloyd “had several helpers in this deception.” It was pointed out that Reuel Lemmons, Carl Ketcherside, Marvin Phillips and Rubel Shelly had joined with Don DeWelt in writing for DeWelt's paper, *The One Body*. “Brother Cloyd was not alone in the deception or the conspiracy.”

Not one to let the liberals rest in their efforts, *Contending For The Faith* continued with its exposure of the Joplin outfit. In the June 1985 issue of the paper, Grady Miller wrote a lengthy article which he titled “The Joplin Meeting.” The article was a recapitulation of about everything which had been previously written. It was of great interest when Cloyd introduced Kearley. He opined, “We have understood, in preparing for this series of meetings, that we would err if we tried to deal with the specific points of difference that separate us.” How anyone can attain to such heights of brilliance is past finding out. Of course, Furman Kearley made certain that he did not err in discussing differences.

Don DeWelt sent out a letter and stated, “We already have a strategy for unity by 1999 on the drawing board.”

R. W. Gray of Bremen, Georgia, had an excellent article titled “Conservative Christian Churches—An Enigma,” which was published in the June, 1985 issue of *Contending For The Faith*. Brother Gray pointed out the utter inconsistencies and contradictions of

Christian Church preachers with respect to unity. "We must never lose sight of the fact that it is the Unity of the Spirit and not the union of finite minds that we seek."

Dalton Key was a participant in the summit meeting, and he wrote, "Reflections On The Summit Meeting From One Who Was There." Brother Key differs somewhat from others who were there, also from others who viewed video tapes of the affair. Our brother wrote, "As the issues were discussed openly, the atmosphere was cordial; the participants, from both groups friendly." I was not there and of course I did not hear "the issues discussed openly," and I just do not believe anyone else did. Was it not Alan Cloyd who said, "We would err if we tried to deal with the specific points of difference that separate us"? Brethren, you just do not go to Joplin and discuss the issues which have divided us. Who can believe it?

Brother Key wrote:

Most alarming to me, however, was the observation that there were more of our brethren present who would freely fellowship and welcome those who use the instrument than there were those of the Christian Church who would be willing to give it up.

Among the sports thugs they call it, "shaving the points." Apologetic brethren at a summit unity affair can really "shave the points." Everybody who knows anything about something realizes that "point shavers" are preferred on the liberal team.

Brother Key wrote, "Personally, I am desirous of unity. This desire prompted me to attend the meeting." When the brother feels qualified to explain how we can be united with the Mormons, Jehovah's Witnesses, and Catholics, then I will explain how we can unite with the Independent Christian Church Denomination. They all claim to baptize for the remission of sins; so why not try to unite with all of them?

A disgusting, deprecating, and devilish report by Larry James was reprinted in the June, 1985 *Contending For The Faith*. James had written, "It seems that I stand in the camp of the weaker brethren. I was made glad last week at the generosity and maturity of my stronger brothers from the Independent Christian Churches." You may not be as weak as I, but in my utter weakness, frailty, and helplessness I never cease to wonder why some of the "stronger brothers from the Independent Christian Church" will not sally forth and destroy all

those weaker brothers of Larry James. None knows the answer better than Larry James.

“Joplin Elders Deny Unity Possible While Division Element Remains.” The elders of the Joplin, Missouri, Connecticut Avenue Church of Christ sent a notice to the *Gospel Advocate* which was printed December 20, 1984. The statement of the elders noted that they received no invitation to the summit. They had no first-hand information about the outfit and had nothing to do with it. With the division element in Joplin, the elders declared, “Unity is not possible.” It would be wonderful if all elders and preachers demonstrated the good sense of those Joplin elders, but such is expecting too much.

It just seems that at least one “knucklehead” needed to report on the Joplin affair, and no person could and would do a better job than Ira Y. Rice, Jr. He pulled out the sword and threw the scabbard away when he reviewed the article written by Furman Kearley, which was published in the *Gospel Advocate* of July 18, 1985. Kearley attempted some sort of mamby-pamby explanation of the disgraceful conversation between himself and Wayne Kilpatrick at Joplin, Missouri. The article by Kearley was titled “Explaining a Misunderstood Dialogue.” The explanation of Kearley is about as flimsy as the explanation given by a man who had been arrested for stealing a cow. He explained to the judge that he did not steal a cow. He found a rope, picked it up, and when he got home he discovered a cow on one end of the rope. If a fellow is a thief, any explanation will seem acceptable.

Brother Rice gave his article the title “Furman Kearley, New Edition of the Advocate—an Enigma.” Please note very carefully how the cow got on to the end of Kearley’s rope. Yes, sir! No doubt about it; everyone who viewed the tapes, listened to the conversation, and reported adversely about it, took the conversation “out of context.” How often do we hear this dodge as given by those who would sell the bride of Christ at a summit auction! All this prattle means that everyone who objected to the Kearley rot just didn’t understand.

Poor brother Kearley accused someone of not “checking it out.” That means each time Kearley says something regardless of how simple and silly the statement might be, said statement needs to be “checked out.”

Anytime a brother needs an alibi, it will suffice to accuse others of playing a “gossip game.” Since when does it become gossip to take a

person's statement and expose the false views set forth? What does it mean to "ease from the class to the pulpit" and "right, you can get by with..."?

With all the slush which has been given in the Kearley article, I keep asking what did the man hope to achieve when he wrote for DeWalt's *One Body*? I wrote a small booklet which was called "Kearley's Cue," in which I refuted the foolishness of Kearley as he prattled that "we ought to receive one another." All on earth he was trying to do was please Don DeWalt. It does not take a Solomon to see that.

In March, 1985, the Garnett Road church in Tulsa, Oklahoma, where Marvin Phillips preached, hosted a Restoration Unity Forum which was truly a sort of secret affair. When one brother heard about the event, he attempted to get information about it. There just seemed to be no information available. The meeting was conducted after the plan of the Joplin Conference. There were around 80 people present. Some of the speakers were Bill Humble, Rubel Shelly, Reuel Lemmons, Richard Rogers, and Jimmy Wood. Heaven help us when such as the above represent us. Of course those men only represented themselves, and what a farce to think that unity could result from anything they said. Are the participants united? It is most interesting that of one small study group "three of the four acappella men (in this group) said they could"—worship with the instrument. Marvin Phillips stated that he was one of those three.

Rubel Shelly put in his plug for the two levels of fellowship, which doesn't even make good nonsense. With his tom-foolery he can fellowship the Catholics.

July 7-9, 1985, found a number of people assembled at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California, for Unity Forum, Number III. This meeting was different in format from the other forums in that various men spoke rather freely. Speaking at the affair were such men as Randy Mayeaux, Carrol Osburn, Alan Cloyd, Reuel Lemmons, Monroe Hawley, Everett Ferguson, Dennis Randall, and Frank Pack. True to form, so many of our brethren proved to be quislings, apologetic, squeamish, fearful, weak, and wobbly. So many seemed to think that their main duty was to apologize to the Independent preachers, and I truly believe those fellows are not so demented as to be beguiled by the two-faced brethren.

Unity Forum IV was conducted at Milligan College, Johnson City, Tennessee, April 29-30, 1986. Notice again the men who went to Milligan. They were Marvin Phillips, Rubel Shelly, Alan Cloyd, Jon Jones, and Calvin Warpula; all claimed to be members of the church of Christ. It would be a real mark of progress if each of the above characters would join the Independents. Who do they think they speak for in those disgraceful forums? After all the forums, do the compromisers have unity? There can be a thousand forums with men like Shelly and such stripe and ilk, but there will never be the "unity of the Spirit" simply because it is impossible to unite with error.

The fifth unity meeting occurred in April 1987, at Cincinnati, Ohio. One report of the meeting declared, "The acappella brethren outnumbered the instrumental folk more than two to one." (*One Body*, Summer 1987). This will not say much for the kind of people who keep trotting to the unity forums. The Digressive preachers are not about to dispense with their denominational baggage, and they have judgment to know that the forums are nothing more than a farce and a sham.

Henry Webb wrote, "Instrumental ministers have a ho-hum attitude about hearing a re-play of the same old arguments they find invalid. We see it as a cultural item and matter of small consequence." Monroe Hawley wrote, "There has been considerable apathy toward these efforts on the part of many instrumental brethren." Of course, and it seems that the Digressives have sense enough to know that one cannot mix water and gasoline. I just do not believe lions and lambs will mate with each other. It is senseless to talk about uniting with some man-made denomination. To prove that these forums on unity were nothing more than child-play, one only needs to know that Rubel Shelly spoke five times at the Fifth Forum. His topics were: (1) Why the concern over unity, (2) The roots of our Division, (3) Jesus Christ: Author of our Unity, (4) Scripture: Our only rule of faith, (5) Fellowship without compromise. No man has done more in Nashville, Tennessee, and elsewhere to foment discord than Rubel Shelly. The Digressives truly like Rubel.

One thing was different in the fifth forum in that sixty days prior to the event certain speakers were to exchange papers with opposing speakers. There would be ten minute rejoinders and then a five-minute oral response after each speech.

There were to be group meetings after the speeches lasting for 30 minutes. After this, five questions would be formulated and given to the main speaker of the hour, during his final 60 minutes.

We continue to read any number of articles by men who refer to the Christian Church preachers as “brethren.” Well, if they are “brethren,” then go ahead and unite with these “brethren.” When those “brethren” are united with, then be sure to unite with the Mormons, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and Catholics. Furman Kearley and some others can explain exactly how such unity can be affected. It will be that wonderful, marvelous, afterthought referred to as Unity-in-Diversity.

Forum VI was conducted November 1-3, 1988, and hosted by the Cuyahoga Falls Church in Akron, Ohio. The theme was “Workmen Together with God.” That is such an impressive, loving, irenic topic to discuss with the Digressives. There were 113 people present from the Christian Church; 76 said they were from the church of Christ. There were four from the Disciples of Christ. Four said they had no preference, and one responded, “Either one is fine with me.”

It is interesting that Monroe Hawley and Doug Foster spoke at this forum. Ervin Waters commended the forum very highly. Some of us remember Waters as the leader of a cult some years ago. He has now flip-flopped like some others who need someone to associate with them.

Forum VII was conducted in September, 1989, at Lincoln Christian College. What a motley crew speaking in the interest of unity! Such notables as Marvin Phillips, Olan Hicks, Monroe Hawley, Reuel Lemmons, Denny Boultinghouse, Joe Schubert, Kay Watts, Doug Foster, Calvin Warpula, and Walt Yancy contributed to destroying the scandal of division. Doug Foster and Calvin Warpula commended the forum. With such brilliance assembled in one holy wow, even the devil must have run away. One Walt Yancy (who is he?), supposedly a member of the church, made his profound and impressive speech by declaring:

There is not one ounce of evidence from scripture, or even a hint of any evidence to support the anti-instrument doctrine. The anti-instrument doctrine is divisive, it is a false doctrine and yes, it is probably even sinful because of its divisive nature.

Yancy should get top-billing at every unity circus affair. The Yancy statement is absolutely too shallow to waste much time or effort in dealing with it.

The *One Body* comment is most interesting when it stated, "More than one brother from a thoroughly non-instrument heritage had publicly taught this conclusion, that the doctrine of exclusively acapella singing in worship is wrong." "The other brother referred to was Olan Hicks." Ugh! Hicks turns and twists like a youngster with a hoola-hoop. Who could possibly pay any attention to him? Hicks asserted, "God is indifferent on the subject of instrumental music." Marvin Phillips, who is a darling when among the Digressives, declared, "Let's recognize the whole family of God...lets love all his kids too."

Restoration Forum VIII was held November 7-9, 1990, at the Garnett Road church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Marvin Phillips explained that not only would hermeneutics be discussed but also "human-cutics" will be a topic of interest. The solid facts are that Phillips and his "human-cutics" are far more important at the Garnett Road church than biblical hermeneutics.

Appearing at the unity forum from the Christian Church were John Caldwell, Ben Merold, and Wayne Shaw. In order to affect unity with the Digressives, such great and notable men as Rubel Shelly, Jerry Jones, and Marvin Phillips were "Church of Christ speakers." Those three men speaking for faithful brethren would be about like having Korah, Dathan, and Abiram acting as cheerleaders for the Israelites.

If one is so foolish as to listen to Marvin Phillips, then we can go ahead and merge with the Digressives. He thinks the two churches "grew out of the Restoration Movement, which was a pure effort for unity."

Phillips said, "The Church of Christ has preached unity more than anyone, and practiced division as much as any denomination." Marvin thinks the "Independent Christian Church and the Church of Christ has about an 85 percent overlap in theology."

If one is not all concerned with facts, then one might be impressed with the remark by Phillips when he prattled, "We were kept apart because we didn't know each other." Prophet Phillips said, "I see some churches having both instrumental and non-instrumental services." Of course that will be when churches "get to know each

other.” More correctly that will be when people lose all their conviction—like Marvin Phillips.

The folks who had worked for eight years to affect unity were miserable failures. All their praying, prattling, and play-acting did not accomplish much unity. The actors enjoyed their strutting across the stage without doubt.

The ninth forum fiasco was staged in Portland, Oregon, November 6-8, 1991, and was hosted by the Crossroads Church of Christ. Such men of renown as Marvin Phillips, Jerry Jones, Jeff Walling, Monroe Hawley, Milton Jones, and Phillip Slate were who could turn war into peace, diversity into unity, and digression into un-paralleled devotion. The antics of semantics displayed at those unity schemes remind us of some holiness preacher trying to heal a totally blind person. There is a lot of babble and blather but no healing.

For what it would profit, only the Skillman Avenue Church in Dallas, Texas, would be able to surmise when it agreed to host Forum X. The make-believe hocus-pocus event was conducted November 10-12, 1992, and the chief men (and not at few) who beat the unity drum were Furman Kearley, Carroll Osburn, Ian Fair, Lynn Anderson, Howard Norton, and Charles Hodge. What a compromise! Did these men bring about unity? Are the two divisions any closer than when the fraternization began? Has anything of value been accomplished? A crew of liberal wacks who believed in agreeing to disagree appear to be extremely stupid while having unity forums yet asserting that Diversity is scriptural.

A quartet of speakers went to Joplin, Missouri, for the 1993 Unity Forum XI. One would think that when Doug Foster, Bob Hendren, Marvin Phillips, and Calvin Warpula had deposited all their brilliance at Ozark Christian College, the scene would be as serene as the night before Christmas, but alas my brother, unity was still not in sight. Is unity the goal, or is the forum a time and place for a few liberals to expel a lot of hot air and make fools of themselves? Some of us are not so deluded as to play children's games of fantasy.

Royce Money welcomed the visitors to the Twelfth Forum at Abilene Christian University. How blessed, jubilant, and thrilled all those Digressive preachers must have been to be welcomed by the President of ACU. How Satan must have smiled to see so many imps assembled in order to make a big show about union. Bill Humble,

Ronnie Norman, Dean Smith, Calvin Warpula, Jack Reese, and Rubel Shelly were able to play the fool's part, but only Shelly got a standing ovation, which speaks volumes as to the new low ebb into which ACU has plunged. Incidentally, Shelly has declared, "The Woodmont Hills Church of Christ has more in common with First Christian Church of Nashville than with Jackson Park." That is one time Shelly wrote the truth, and he could have stated that he has more unity with Jews and Atheists than with any number of faithful brethren around Nashville.

Restoration Forum XIII was conducted at Louisville Bible College, November 8-10, 1995. Forum XIV was held in Milwaukee, Wisconsin, November 10-12, 1996, with Bob Hooper, Monroe Hawley, Kent Smith, Marvin Phillips, and Larry James as speakers.

Forum XV was held at Florida Christian College in Orlando-Kissimmee, Florida, November 9-11, 1997. Here we see Rubel Shelly, Denny Boultinghouse, James Smith, Jack Exum, and Robert Shannon as the great warriors leading the battle for diversity and union.

As was true of the Murch-Witty fiasco, so it is true of the new movement which began at Joplin, Missouri, back in 1984. All the mouthings about unity have been nothing more than much ado about nothing. The men who supposedly give a weak lip service to being members of the church of Christ have apologized, compromised, made excuses, flattered, brown-nosed, boot-licked, charmed, slobbered over, courted, honey-mouthed, and plea-bargained beyond belief. I actually read the statement of a Christian Church preacher in an article he wrote and in which he gasped, "I cannot believe what I'm hearing." This was written after listening to some of the traitors who were actually making apologies for what conservative brethren believed. This will help to understand something of the ilk and stripe as well as the mentality of some of those men who met with Christian Church preachers.

One of the Christian Church preachers stated that he had invited several of the Conservative preachers from the church of Christ to appear on the unity forums but none would accept. Thank God! We do have brethren who know the difference in the church of Christ and a denomination. Yes, there are those who know the difference in the precious Bride of Christ and Jezebel, and for faithful brethren who know, it is no mark of intelligence to fake some sort of union between the two.

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FELLOWSHIP AND PREACHERS

Bob Berard



Bob Berard is a graduate of Southwest Institute of Bible Studies; holds B.S. and M.S. degrees from Lamar University and B.A. degree in New Testament Greek from the University of Texas at Austin. He has done local work in Texas. Bob has been an instructor for Southwest School of Bible Studies for nine years and an instructor at the Houston College of the Bible for five years. He is active in gospel meetings, lectureships, preacher training schools, and personal work in the states and abroad. Bob is currently Director of the Houston College of the Bible.

INTRODUCTION

Far from simply eating a meal together with a resultant good time had by all, fellowship with God and His people spans the breadth of one's life in Christ and wields an influence for good and against evil, unequaled in power! This fellowship involves man's harmony of heart and cooperation of effort with the supreme Authority of Heaven and earth. Such fellowship obtains only when men submit to God's revealed counsel in thought, word, and deed (Mat. 4:4; 6:24; Acts 10:35; 2 Cor. 6:1; 10:5; Col. 3:17; 1 John 1:3-7). In so doing, they unite with, or fellowship, the Almighty as His indomitable spiritual army, and can say with Paul: "If God is for us, who is against us?" and "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us" (Rom. 8:37).

This extensive beneficial influence exerted by man's fellowship with God means that fellowship abused is tragic; nevertheless, it is common, as common as sin (Rom. 3:23; 1 Cor. 5:6; 1 John 1:6). Both the neglect of Christian duties by inaction and the performance of acts not authorized by God are contrary to His will and inconsistent with His fellowship (Jam. 4:17; 1 John 1:6). All sin then is detrimental to fellowship with God since it counters God's cooperative work with man, reduces good influence to nil, and enlists unholy fortifications in the devil's ranks. Thus, those persisting in sin align themselves with

Satan in opposition to God and undermine fellowship with God (Mat. 12:30; Jam. 1:22; 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 3:4).

GOSPEL PREACHERS' SPECIAL VISIBILITY AND RESPONSIBILITIES REGARDING FELLOWSHIP

The responsibilities of Christian fellowship are upon all of God's children; however, public proclaimers of the Gospel, by virtue of their work, are often more visible in the brotherhood as to whom they fellowship and from whom they withhold fellowship than are other members. Even more importantly, evangelists are obligated to preach the whole counsel of God which is permeated by the biblical doctrine of fellowship (2 Tim. 4:2; Acts 20:26-27; 2 John 9). This preaching and teaching is not only by spoken and written words—it is also communicated by behavior. As Paul told Timothy, “be thou **an example** to them that believe, in word, **in manner of life**, in love, in faith, in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12). Given these greater opportunities for influence, preachers carry greater responsibility and face a weightier judgment (Jam. 3:1). Therefore, preachers, even more so than other members, direfully need to know, teach, and practice biblical fellowship and to respect its limitations. With preachers particularly in mind then, as to both their teaching and practice, the remainder of this chapter addresses Christian fellowship obligations under two major headings: (1) the duty to fellowship all who are in fellowship with God, and (2) the duty to withhold fellowship from all who are out of fellowship with God.

THE DUTY TO FELLOWSHIP THOSE WHO ARE IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

The Psalmist said, “I am a companion of all them that **fear thee**, And of them that **observe thy precepts**” (Psa. 119:63). He spoke of extending fellowships to others according to the Divine criteria of fearing God and keeping His commandments (Ecc. 12:13). The criteria is the same in the New Testament order: “In every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is acceptable to him” (Acts 10:35). Clearly God wants men to conform to His heart or attitudes, and to comply with His authorization, and men of such heart and compliance want others of like mind to join them in fellowship with God (Mat. 4:4; 22:39; Col. 3:17). God not only authorizes (permits or approves) fellowship on the above noted bases, He also obli-

gates (demands or requires) man to fellowship other men of right heart and life. Jesus explained the “in” and “out” of fellowship saying: “He that is not with me is against me, and he that gathereth not with me scattereth” (Mat. 12:30). He corrected James and John in their confusion about His disciples explaining that “he that is not against us is for us” (Mark 9:40). If one is truly with and for the Lord, he gathers with the Lord; that is, he conforms himself to the Lord’s primary concern of saving souls, his own and others. He, thereby, becomes the spiritual companion and co-laborer of those doing likewise (Luke 19:10; Mat. 10:28; 16:26; 22:39). If he refuses fellowship to those who are for and with the Lord, he opposes the Lord as well (Acts 9:4).

Despite the Lord’s instruction on extending fellowship, glaring disregard of the same occurred in the early church and among the best of preachers. Peter, a preacher and an apostle of Christ, wrongfully withdrew fellowship from Gentile brethren, fearing the Jews. He was rebuked by the apostle Paul, who concisely expressed the seriousness of Peter’s error explaining that it was “because he [Peter] stood condemned” (Gal. 2:11-12). Peter’s action on this occasion, being sin, was not only a breach of fellowship with his Gentile brethren—like all other sin it was a breach of fellowship with God.

In defiance of fellowship obligations, the church today has far more members out of fellowship with God and His faithful than are in, and preachers often lead the way. Consider the following groups of such violators:

1. Most numerous in the flight from fellowship with God and His faithful are liberal brethren who continue to profess Christ’s name, conduct worship services, and do religious works, but ignore His authority (Tit. 1:16; Col. 3:17; Isa. 59:1-2). Though they claim to be broadening *fellowship*, in actuality, liberals overstep the bounds of God’s fellowship (2 John 9). Extending what they suppose to be God’s fellowship, but actually loosing the bounds thereof, they are only extending their human fellowship and the devil’s.

Hireling preachers lead the way in this digression in defiance of both their obligation to personally comply with God’s requirements and their obligation to proclaim to the church all the obligatory matters which contribute to fellowship within the bounds of Truth (John 8:31-32; 17:17-21; Acts 20:26-27; 2 Tim. 4:3-4).

2. Thousands of brethren in various anti-camps, like their Judaizing counterparts of the first century church, have broken fellowship with the faithful by insisting upon man-made laws for God's heritage (Gal. 2:3-5). These are guilty of violating the Bible-based guideline of liberty in options (Rom. 14). Where the liberal looses what God has bound (and thereby compromises Divine fellowship), the anti binds where God has loosed, compromising the same Standard (Mat. 16:18-19).

3. Millions of full-tilt worldly apostates, like Paul's one time co-worker, Demas, have forsaken the Lord. They have "left the church" and the divinely-approved fellowship for a fling with the devil's illicit pleasures (Heb. 11:25; Col. 4:14; 2 Tim. 4:10). These often completely abandon any semblance of worship and service to God in their rejection of God's obligations. Every few years, like Demas, one of our faithful preaching brethren leaves the Lord and the faithful for love of the world.

4. Many indifferent or otherwise wrong-spirited and hypocritical apostates still worship or go through the motions of worship among the faithful; they still enjoy some interaction with their brethren. They associate and participate with the brethren, but their hearts are not with God or the cherished goal of His people. Typically, their works are minimal acts of convenience or efforts to win the approval of men. They are deficient in love for God, truth, and souls. Perhaps some who are supposed to be faithful Gospel preachers are in this number.

What Should Preachers Do Regarding the Duty to Fellowship Those in Fellowship with God?

1. **Preachers Must Conform in Obligatory Matters** (Col. 3:17; 2 Tim. 3:16-17; 2 Tim. 4:2). This is a duty as broad as the whole of New Testament mandates and the way God prescribes for having fellowship with Him and His faithful people (2 John 9). When preachers personally conform to God's demands and preach that same conformity, the Word of God prevails (Isa. 55:11).

God's preached Word is the divinely-appointed means through which God's mind is declared that man might know the heart of God and the direction God would have him go (1 Cor. 1:21). Only in coming to a knowledge of God's obligations can man come to have a heart like God's and do as God would have him do (2 Tim. 3:16-17).

2. Preachers Must Grant Liberty in Optional Matters.

Preaching the truth involves declaring the right of brethren to differ on matters of option (Gal. 2:3-5). Some brethren, perhaps overly caught up in their zeal to oppose the swelling tide of liberalism are drawing, or are poised to draw, their own lines of fellowship, cutting off some who are still in fellowship with God. Those insisting on the King James Version as the only acceptable Bible version and those marking and avoiding brethren without any proof of the sin alleged are doing anything but endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit. Are these preachers unfamiliar with the grief caused the church by the antis of a few decades ago who bound (and still bind) what they only suspected to be sin (Pro. 6:16-19; 17:15)? Do they think that the cure for liberalism is to tighten up the doctrine of Christ?

3. Preachers Must Have Love in All Matters. Truly loving preachers endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace; they follow the Lord's total fellowship program, a program which mandates the extension of fellowship to all who are in fellowship with God. Loving preachers will not disrupt fellowship because they envy the success of their preaching brethren; rather, they will rejoice that the truth is proclaimed with good results (1 Cor. 13:6; Phi. 1:15-17). They will not care who gets credit for a spiritual victory; but, squelching every prideful inclination, they will continue to preach Christ and Him crucified, giving glory to God, and credit where credit is due (Rom. 13:7; 1 Cor. 2:2; 10:31). They will forego "getting-even," being willing to suffer wrong rather than harm the Lord's cause (1 Pet. 2:20). They will not press matters of option to the dividing of brethren and will not resort to unscriptural tactics even in addressing the most consequential violations of God's mandates (Col. 3:17; Rom. 14:3). They will not wrongly conceal a matter or be naive in their judgment, but will view things in the best possible light giving others the benefit of the doubt (1 Cor. 13:5-7).

THE DUTY TO WITHDRAW AND WITHHOLD FELLOWSHIP FROM THOSE NOT IN FELLOWSHIP WITH GOD

God desires to bring all lost men into salvation and into His fellowship, a goal contingent upon man's obedience to the Gospel (Gal. 3:26-27; 2 The. 1:7-9; 2 Pet. 3:9). However, consistent with His desire to save and fellowship man, God charges the faithful to withdraw and

withhold their fellowship from those not complying with the terms for His fellowship (2 The. 3:6, 14-15; 1 Cor. 5:5). The authoritative, unchanging doctrine of Christ encircles all those in fellowship with God, thereby indicating those who should be fellowshiped by God's faithful; simultaneously it delineates those not in fellowship with God and who should not be fellowshiped by the faithful (2 John 9).

Therefore, one complies with God's desire to save and fellowship men when he obeys God in withdrawing and withholding fellowship from those who are out of fellowship with God. When one behaves toward those out of fellowship with God in a manner indicating that he is in fellowship with them, he disregards God's demands regarding the limits of fellowship and His desire for saving souls.

Frequent Failures to Withdraw and Withhold Fellowship

Ignoring the Bible's requirement to withdraw fellowship from the disorderly member is business as usual in most churches. In like sinful manner, wilder liberal brethren increasingly extend fellowship to both the disorderly member and to non-members of the Lord's church. Elders are primarily responsible for this sin because they are charged to rule or lead those they oversee in keeping every Bible mandate (Heb. 13:17; 2 The. 3:6). If they did their job, preachers and other brethren would follow suit or be excluded themselves. However, many elders seem oblivious to their charge to take heed and to watch for the souls of their flocks; surely many giving flawless account of each dollar in the treasury will be surprised when they are called to "give account" for each person under their oversight (Acts 20:28; Heb. 13:17; 1 Pet. 5:1-3).

Preachers have contributed to the church's failure to withdraw and withhold fellowship according to God's will by failing to dispense anything but minute doses of instructive discipline and even less corrective discipline. Some have used both words and deeds to make incremental or wholesale changes in the pattern of sound words, and consequently, to distort the bounds of biblical fellowship (2 Tim. 1:13; 2 John 9-11).

Rank apostates like Max Lucado have pulled out the stops with a go-for-all-the-fellowship-you-can-get approach. With book sales like Lucado enjoys, why not broaden the book-buying base? If Lucado's god is not his belly, whose is (Rom. 16:17-18)?

The devil, of course, knows that many cannot be deceived by the obvious departures of denominational religion or its contemptible copy-cats like Lucado, Shelly, and Walling. Accordingly, the chief deceiver has devised more subtle ways of prompting encroachments in the faithful church's fellowship. He tailors them to fit the differing whims of men. The hirelings' ilk tapers off from the most blasphemous and blatant liars to those with fewer and less grievous false doctrines (not to say that any false doctrine is acceptable, just that some have more grievous consequences). Finally their lot whittles down to those cowards who tell no lies and teach no fatal error, but knowingly withhold vital truths (Acts 20:26-27; 2 Tim. 3:13; 4:3-4). It is this last batch that softens the soil to accept fatal error.

Knowing that many folks like to ease into, rather than plunge into apostasy, the devil cunningly prepares their palate for false doctrine by first removing the staples of their spiritual diet for a season. Particularly, this basic spiritual food is that clearly conflicting with the main course of fermented wickedness he plans to serve later. Years removed from hearing preaching about man's accountability to God and responsibility to obey every Bible obligation, benumbed brethren are far more susceptible to change-agent doctrines like women church leaders, innovations in the pattern of worship, and fellowship with denominations. Thus, the no-error-but-not-all-the-truth-either preacher is also a devil's servant; he simply works at a "cleaner" level of the soul-subverting operation. Such cannot claim with Paul to be "pure from the blood of all men" and such do not stand justified before God (Acts 20:26-27).

Whether the overt and insolent or the covert and careful approach of undermining the ancient landmarks of God's truth, preachers so involved are traitors to the Captain of salvation. May their tribe decrease and rapidly so.

The Current Apostasy Confuses Fellowship Matters

With the current digression underway, many good, conscientious brethren understandably will, on occasion, be mistaken in their fellowship decisions. An unfaithful brother will be used in the church's work by a church that knows nothing of his sin. Faithful preachers will agree to speak on a program not knowing of its sponsor's harmful stance. A brother, who from all reports was true to God on one day, may, like Demas, seemingly change his loyalty overnight. Similarly,

an eldership or entire congregation may drift from the moorings of truth in relatively short time. Given such numerous fickle individuals and churches, fellowship mistakes will be made. The faithful will simply continue to do their best and make correction for mistakes as they are learned (1 John 1:7-9). Those loving souls will not be too hasty or too harsh in making accusations of wrong-doing (1 The. 5:14; 2 Tim. 4:2). “For judgment is without mercy to him that hath showed no mercy” (Jam. 2:13).

Nevertheless, the times of difficult discernment are no excuse for being willfully indiscriminate in decisions regarding using or being used in works, thereby ignoring God’s demands to withhold fellowship from some. Such misconduct should be rebuked by the faithful and those involved should repent (2 Tim. 4:2).

Disguised Fellowship Errors

Consistent with the devil’s wily ways, various brotherhood men are at times knowingly or unknowingly involved in fellowship of those they should be withdrawn from. Particularly in mind are the elderships, churches, schools, and editors who use false teachers in an approving way and the preachers who allow themselves to be used by apostate sponsors. Consider in turn the “use-any-preacher” sponsor and the “preach-anywhere” preachers.

Use-Any-Preacher Elderships, Churches, Editors, et al.

Many elderships and others in position to invite preachers to preach or write, often with the advice and encouragement of a so-called gospel preacher, use preachers who hold and teach fatal error. When challenged, some of these have replied that such a preacher will not be speaking on their lectureship or writing in their paper about the false doctrine that he holds. Their rationale seems to be: “we can use any preacher we want to use, as long as he preaches the truth on our program; we are responsible only for the work he does while he is with us.” They fail to see or do not care to see that the implications of this practice are their approval of the false teacher, and thus their fellowship with him in violation of Ephesians 5:11, 2 Corinthians 6:17, and 2 John 9-11. Using him in their work declares that there is a harmony of hearts and a cooperation of efforts between them and him. Following their practice of using a man to do a spiritual work in disregard of his being out of fellowship with God, a

church could use Billy Graham or Yassar Arafat for a gospel meeting, so long as he preaches the truth on that occasion.

Preach-Anywhere Preachers.

Akin in philosophy to use-any-preacher elderships, some preachers declare their “right” to preach anywhere they are invited to preach. They agree, on occasion, to participate in spiritual works that are controlled by apostate brethren, works that are used to undermine the Lord’s cause. They insist that they can preach the Gospel wherever they please without regard for spiritual costs; they deny that such has any spiritual downside.

When brethren desperately need a clear and united picture of the faithful of Christ rightly applying the Bible doctrine of fellowship in opposition to those departing from God, and when brethren need to see in **action** as well as in **affirmations** that God’s people will have no part of the God-forsaking conduct of liberal apostates, some of our notable men are blurring the lines of fellowship (Rom. 12:9; Eph. 5:11; Phi. 3:17). Their voiced opposition to the digressives, without an avoiding of them, fails to send the clear message that God wants in telling the brotherhood who is in and who is not in God’s fellowship (Rom. 16:17-18).

Please hear an explanation noting what is not and what is opposed regarding these preach-anywhere preachers.

1. Of course, there is nothing sinful in preaching the Gospel! Indeed, the opposite is the case since that very preaching is commanded by the Lord (Mat. 28:18-20; Mark 16:15-16).

2. There is nothing sinful in being among sinners of the world or even among apostate brethren in some situations. Some of the best work a preacher can do involves his being amongst and in direct interaction with those who are out of fellowship with the Lord. Properly conducted debates with brethren who support fatal error and the rare opportunities to speak in denominational pulpits are instances in which truth can shine from the very midst of darkness and bring beneficial results.

Similarly, the preacher who is allowed to speak at a liberal congregation may do so in some circumstances, since his presence alone does not constitute forbidden fellowship (Gal. 6:1-2; Eph. 5:11). He should, however, weigh the good he may do in the pulpit against the harm that may be done by knowledge of his whereabouts independent

of a knowledge of his spoken words (Rom. 14:15-16). Such judgments may be difficult to make, but we ought to have enough sense to know that some care is needed—and more than just the fact that someone will be somewhere to hear the Gospel preached should be considered.

3. There is something sinful (and this is the thing here opposed) about being among apostate brethren and preaching the Gospel when such is conditioned upon making concessions affording the devil to have his day as part of the package. It is this third part of the conduct, the concession made to permit the enemy to advance his agenda, that is faulted. A preacher can do much harm to the cause of Christ if his acceptance of an appointment to preach the true Gospel of Christ is contingent upon his agreement to conditions which are certain to result in a second and far more influential and destructive message also being “preached.”

For example, Abilene Christian University (ACU)¹ sends flyers, brochures, and/or posters far and wide in promoting its lectureship. If the program lists, but makes no distinction between a Rubel Shelly and a Johnny Ramsey on the program, the message sent to many will be that these men and ACU are in cahoots.² Large, attractive posters advertising the ACU lectures are displayed in church meeting houses where brethren do not know better or could care less about what they disseminate. By this material, the young people of that congregation are encouraged to attend such institutions of higher education and soul damnation. The liberals, many of whom are always looking for something to defend their liberalism, can be all the more persuasive with those having reservations about ACU, saying, “Look, Johnny Ramsey is on the program!”

Specifically criticized is a Gospel preacher agreeing to speak on a lectureship program, knowing that: (1) the sponsor is out of fellowship with God, (2) speakers on the program are out of fellowship with God, (3) his name will be listed on a program among those apostate speakers with no distinction made as to him being any different from them, (4) no note, other than what he may say in his speech, will be made as to his being against the sponsor, against the other speakers, or against the false doctrines advanced by the sponsor or other speakers, and (5) there will be mass advertising of the program of sponsor

with a list of the participants including him in such a fashion as to convey the cooperative efforts of all concerned.

Is it not obvious that the message of a typical lectureship flyer of this sort in essence is saying: "This sponsoring institution is doing the work it wants to do through the cooperative effort of all of the listed speakers"? Is it not also reasonably concluded that each man whose name and picture appears on the advertisement knew in advance that such advertising would be done and that it would picture him as being one among many who would be working together in a common effort? Since the flyer is a product of the sponsor, would the sponsor be knowingly acting contrary to its own interest? No, the men calling the shots know what they are doing, and they are doing what they think will further the effort they want furthered. Why would the men calling the shots for the program, men who are not in fellowship with God, want to use a Gospel preacher who opposes their doctrines and their direction on their program? Obviously they see some benefit in using him!! Is it not strange that the Gospel preacher who opposes their goals, but agrees to speak on their program and be advertised with their parrots, does not see his part in contributing to their ends?

Would the same preacher allow himself to be so used if he knew beforehand that the advertising would have him explicitly labeled as a false teacher or by some other depreciative label? If not, why not? Do such men not maintain that as long as they are able to preach the Gospel, nothing else matters?

I marveled one year to hear brother Dave Miller explain how he and brother Ramsey had tried to dissuade a youngster from attending an apostate university. While appreciating that effort and many other efforts of brother Miller, his effort was certainly contradicted by what both he and brother Ramsey have done in agreeing to appear on apostate university programs. The ads in publications, the flyers, the brochures, and the posters send a message to tens of thousands, by virtue of the reputation of a good name, that this university is still loyal to the Lord. It is a short-sighted approach that fails to notice the harm which can be done by a good thing (Gospel preaching) done in a wrong manner (preaching on an apostate lectureship) (Heb. 5:12-14; Jam. 3:13-18).

Objections of the Preach-Anywhere Preachers.

Some have defended the Gospel preacher's preaching on programs of digressive brethren. Hear several objections with refutation.

1. Preachers are **not in fellowship** with those they mingle with **unless they "agree** together and endorse one another" (my emp., BB).³ While no one has fellowship with God unless he agrees with God, not so much is required to constitute fellowship with error; the devil is not nearly so particular as God. John indicates that brethren are not to indicate their approval of a false teacher by receiving him into their house or by extending him a greeting. This does not mean that a false teacher could not be assisted in any way, but it does mean he should not be so treated as to indicate approval of his false doctrine. Surely, John does not mean that one can do whatever he likes to indicate approval of the false teacher as long as he does not actually agree with him (2 John 9). With this restricted definition of fellowship error, the Corinthian brethren were doing no wrong in allowing the brazen fornicator to continue enjoying their association, so long as they did not **agree** with him. Why did Paul not simply command that church to cease their agreeing with and endorsement of the fornicator?

2. Another brother emphasizes the good that can be done by the speaking opportunity, and cites as proof, the harm that could be done in a sound lectureship if Rubel Shelly were given just a small classroom of people. If a Rubel Shelly could do harm with a small part in a sound program, a Johnny Ramsey could do good on an unsound one. What is proven by this objection? Only that a Gospel preacher preaching the Gospel can do some good; but, this is something no one is contesting. The problem is paying too high a price to preach the Gospel. The price might be, doing even more harm than the good that could result from the preached Gospel. Could the brother not spend the same time and energy preaching without the adverse effect?

3. The claim is made that such an appearance is no different than what Jesus did in association with the sinners of His day. Are the cases parallel? No! Jesus was in the midst of sinners teaching the truth and this is not at all what is opposed, nor should it be. Such situations afford excellent opportunities to do some of the best work Gospel preachers can do. What Jesus did and what the preachers herein

faulted do are not at all the same thing. Compare and contrast what Jesus did and what a preach-anywhere preacher, whom we will call Johnny, does. Pay attention to the prepositions.

Jesus and Johnny are seen present **among** sinners; Jesus and Johnny are **in** association with sinners; neither Jesus nor Johnny agree **with** false teachers or other sinners; but, the big difference is that Jesus is teaching **to** sinners and Johnny is teaching **with** false teachers. Johnny is not wrong by being **among** the false brethren on an apostate lectureship per se; he is not wrong for having some sort of association **with** the false teachers; and, he is certainly not wrong for disagreeing **with** and teaching **against** false teachers on the lecture-ships in question. But Johnny is wrong for teaching **with** the false teacher in such a way as to give the impression to thousands who receive the advertising that he and they are working in harmony with the apostate lectureship.

A real parallel between Jesus and the preach-anywhere preachers would involve Jesus' agreement to speak on the ASU (Annual Sadducee University) lectureship with a number of false teachers of the Sadducee sect. His consent would give permission for advertising to be sent all over Palestine listing His perfect name, Jesus Christ, right between Rabbi E. Z. Doctrin and Rabbi I. B. Aham with others of the heretical religious elite. Many would conclude along the lines of "birds of a feather flock together," thus lowering Jesus' reputation, raising the Sadducee's reputation, and confusing the masses. The blindly loyal ASU alumni would use the advertising about Jesus' participation to defend the heretical university to those questioning its stand or the other speakers' loyalty to God. "How can ASU be at odds with God?" they might ask, "We have His Son on the ASU lectures!"

An Appeal. Preach-anywhere preachers need to re-evaluate their practice and its consequence. Jesus said:

Whoso shall cause one of these little ones that believe on me to stumble, it is profitable for him that a great millstone should be hanged about his neck, and *that* he should be sunk in the depth of the sea (Mat. 18:6).

CONCLUSION

In concept the Bible's teaching on fellowship is simple, but complexity and faith-testing pressures build in application of its truths. The current digression compounds the difficulty. May God help us to

ever trust in Him and firmly resolve to heed His Word extending fellowship to all who are in fellowship with Him and withholding or withdrawing fellowship from all those who are out of fellowship with Him.

ENDNOTES

¹Those not realizing the apostate state of this university should read David P. Brown's *A.C.U., Ever Changing, Never Changing?* (Austin, TX: Biblical Notes, 1993).

²See the 75th Annual Abilene Christian University Bible Lectureship, *Studies in Matthew*, February 21-24, 1993.

³Dave Miller, "A Balanced View of Fellowship," audio tape recording of lecture delivered at 11th Annual Shenandoah Lectureship, 1997, Shenandoah Church of Christ, San Antonio, Texas.

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION

Lester Kamp



Lester Kamp was born in Huntington, Indiana, in 1946. He is married to the former Lillian White, and they have two children. He has a B.A. degree from David Lipscomb College (1965) and has done graduate work toward a MAT degree at Andrews University. He taught high school mathematics for five years. Lester began preaching full time in 1973. He has preached for congregations in Indiana, Missouri, Louisiana, Ohio, Kentucky, Texas, and Colorado. He has spoken on several lectureships and conducted gospel meetings in 11 states. Lester has written for numerous brotherhood publications including *The World Evangelist*, *Bulletin Digest*, *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, and *The Christian Bible Teacher*. For several years he has written a weekly newspaper column and has spoken on a weekly radio program. Edited *In Word And Doctrine* for over three years and is founding editor of *Matters of THE Faith* since 1994. Lester was director of the School of the Bible and the College of the Bible in Madisonville, Kentucky, for three years and served on the faculty of the Houston College of the Bible in Spring, Texas. Lester currently works with the East Alameda Church of Christ in Aurora, Colorado.

INTRODUCTION

The idea of guilt by association is an important one because of its relevance to situations which occur frequently in our lives that require definite decisions on our part. Some of these dilemmas relate to those who are preachers, but others of these problems impact all Christians. Preachers have to make decisions about involvement in preachers' luncheons, at which there are false teachers from various congregations. When the opportunities arise, preachers have to decide whether they should accept invitations to speak on lectureships. Part of this decision making process should include consideration of the other speakers and the general reputation of the lectureship in terms of soundness. For most lectureships, subjects are assigned and guidelines are given. If one does not have the opportunity or the determination to speak out and expose the errors and the false teachers involved, then he becomes guilty by association. If the error is not exposed, then the association with those in error is endorsement.

What of members who find themselves in a congregation where error is taught or practiced without refutation? When members remain in that congregation, they become guilty of the error by their continued association with that congregation though they disagree with what is taught or practiced there. There comes a time after continued objections are made to no avail regarding the error when faithfulness to God requires disassociating oneself from a congregation which does not follow God's Word. There is something more important than fond memories of the congregation in years gone by, more important than weddings and other special occasions taking place in that building over the years, and more important than family and friends who are members of that congregation. It is more important to be faithful to God, faithful to His Word. "We must obey God" (Acts 5:29).

Though these people do not teach error, they are guilty because of their association with those who do. Though these people do not practice error themselves, they become guilty of sin by their association with those who practice error. These issues are relevant to many situations with which we have to deal today. The Bible should be our guide in this and all matters. The purpose of this study is to look at what God has to say about "guilt by association."

EXAMPLES IN SCRIPTURE

Let us first observe that the idea of "guilt by association" can be identified by some examples given in the Scriptures. In these passages we can see that God disapproves of continued association with those who practice things contrary to His Will. Continued association will bring God's wrath and punishment. "Guilt by association" is a principle which can be identified in Scripture; God considers those who continue in such association with evil guilty and worthy of punishment.

Genesis 19

Recall the destruction of Sodom. Because of the sinfulness of the city God was going to destroy it. Abraham had earlier pleaded with God to spare the city if only ten righteous souls could be found (Gen. 18:32). Ten such could not be found. Peter describes Lot in this situation:

And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked: (For that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and

hearing, vexed *his* righteous soul from day to day with *their* unlawful deeds) (2 Peter 2:7-8).

God sent two angels to warn Lot and his family of the imminent destruction of the city. On the morning of the destruction, the angels gave these instructions to Lot:

Arise, take thy wife, and thy two daughters, which are here; lest thou be consumed in the iniquity of the city...Escape for thy life; look not behind thee, neither stay thou in all the plain; escape to the mountain, lest thou be consumed (Gen. 19:15-17).

Though Lot was righteous he would have died if he had continued his association with the inhabitants of Sodom. He was to completely sever his relationship with the city; he was not even to look back at the destruction lest he be consumed with the wicked. “Remember Lot’s wife” (Luke 17:32). Continued association with the guilty would have brought punishment. Those who continued their association with the wicked were considered by God “guilty by association.” Surely remembering Lot’s wife teaches this lesson.

Numbers 16

In Numbers 16 Korah, the son of Izhar, led a rebellion against the authority of Moses and Aaron. Moses’ appraisal was: “*Both* thou and all thy company *are* gathered together against the LORD” (Num. 16:11). Korah and his companions complained, “*Ye take* too much upon you, seeing all the congregation *are* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is* among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD?” (Num. 16:3). Moses responded, “Even to morrow the LORD will shew who *are* his, and *who is* holy; and will cause *him* to come near unto him: even *him* whom he hath chosen will he cause to come near unto him” (Num. 16:5). God purposed to destroy the whole congregation of Israel at this time. Moses, however, intervened and pleaded in behalf of the people. God spared them because of Moses’ pleas. But notice that God originally planned to destroy all of Israel—those directly responsible for the rebellion along with those who were in association with them. Those innocent of rebellion were guilty by association because they were **with** those who were guilty. Ultimately two hundred fifty men lost their lives because of this rebellion. The earth opened, and they perished. An interesting statement for our present study is found later in this same chapter of Numbers. “And he spake unto the congrega-

tion, saying, Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs, lest ye be consumed in all their sins” (Num. 16:26). These instructions here reveal that had they not completely separated themselves from Korah and his co-conspirators they would have been consumed along with those who had rebelled. They would have been guilty by their very association with Korah and the others. Those who were innocent of rebellion had to completely and totally separate themselves from the guilty lest they also be consumed by the wrath of God. God said, “Depart, I pray you, from the tents of these wicked men, and touch nothing of theirs.” In verses 32-33 we are told that

the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed them up, and their houses, and all the men that *appertained* unto Korah, and all *their* goods. They, and all that *appertained* to them, went down alive into the pit, and the earth closed upon them: and they perished from among the congregation.

Those that “*appertained* unto Korah” does refer to his children for they “died not” (Num. 26:11). Those that “*appertained* unto Korah” must, therefore, refer to those who associated themselves with him. Among these were some who were guilty only because of their association with Korah. They were guilty by association.

Joshua 23

Else if ye do in any wise go back, and cleave unto the remnant of these nations, *even* these that remain among you, and shall make marriages with them, and go in unto them, and they to you: Know for a certainty that the LORD your God will no more drive out *any of* these nations from before you; but they shall be snares and traps unto you, and scourges in your sides, and thorns in your eyes, until ye perish from off this good land which the LORD your God hath given you (Jos. 23:12-13).

Allowing the heathen nations to remain in the land and associating with them would influence Israel to sin. Israel would become guilty of sin because of their association with those who lived contrary to God’s Word. God’s constant warning against such association with evil manifests the danger of such fellowship.

Ezra 9

When Israel returned from captivity the people, including the priests and the Levites, had “not separated themselves from the people of the lands” (Ezra 9:1). This had led to “*doing* according to their

abominations” (Ezra 9:1). The guilt of sin had resulted from their association with the wicked. When guilt occurs, then the wrath of God is warranted and certain. Israel observed:

Should we again break thy commandments, and join in affinity with the people of these abominations? wouldest not thou be angry with us till thou hadst consumed us, so that *there should be* no remnant nor escaping? (Ezra 9:14).

They recognized that “affinity with the people of these abominations” was harmful because it brought the guilt of sin upon them.

Psalm 1

In the first verse of this Psalm there is a description of the God-blessed person; the holy life of those devoted to serving God. The description could be summarized: “Avoid the company of the wicked.” One has stated, “Three kinds of wickedness are described; active participation in evil counsels, quiet acquiescence in sin, association with scoffers.”¹ This verse has often been used by Bible teachers to show the progressive nature of sin denoted by the words: *walketh, standeth, sitteth*. Notice here the suggestion that the righteous man recognizes the danger of continued association with the wicked. It is, of course, impossible to eliminate all association with the wicked of the world. Another commentator has well stated the meaning of the verse: “You must mix with them in daily business; but do not choose their society. When let go from necessary engagements, make for the people of God (Acts 4:23).”² Association with the wicked is dangerous because of its effects; association with the righteous is to be preferred (Rom. 12:10).

Psalm 26

David contemplates his determination not to sin. As he describes his determination in this regard, he reveals, at least in part, how this is done. He states, “I have not sat with vain persons, neither will I go in with dissemblers. I have hated the congregation of evil doers; and will not sit with the wicked” (Psa. 26:4-5). David realized that association with others has an impact on activity in sin or abstinence from sin. He would not sit down with those whose lives are empty; he would not hang around those who were pretending to be something that they were not; he despised the association of those who practiced evil; and

he would not linger among the wicked. The guilt of sin often comes through one's associates.

1 Corinthians 15:33

Paul tells us "Evil companionships corrupt good morals" (1 Cor. 15:33, ASV). Association with evil characters influences those in that association to sin. If we are to maintain a godly life, we must be careful to associate with those who will help us live righteously and not with those who will bring us under the yoke of sin. It must be recognized that is usually easier to pull others down to a lower level of life than to pull others up to the level of life that God desires of us.

SPECIFIC WARNINGS ABOUT ASSOCIATION

Repeatedly God has warned us about having fellowship with the wicked, the false teacher, and those who have departed from the faith. Fellowship with God's people is a wonderful blessing; fellowship with the world is destructive. We must be in fellowship (association) with those who are in fellowship with God; we dare not fellowship those who are not in fellowship with God.

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...But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another (1 John 1:3, 7).

Association is based on "walking in the light," on obeying God's Word.

2 Corinthians 6

When God's people refuse to "come out from among" those who walk contrary to His instructions, we disobey God and become guilty of sin by our association. The inspired Paul tells us, "Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers" (2 Cor. 6:14). God states through Paul, "Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate" (2 Cor. 6:17). The foolishness of fellowship with the sinful world is pointed out by several questions raised which make such association absurd. "What fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness?...what part hath he that believeth with an infidel?" (2 Cor. 6:14-15). There is no common ground; there is to be no fellowship between God's people and those who serve Satan. About such association, God says come out from it. To fail to do so is disobeying God.

In terms of association with a congregation which is no longer following the mandates of God's Word, Dub McClish wrote:

Those who are determined to faithfully serve God sometimes find themselves allied with those who decidedly are not. This applies to many members of congregations that still wear the name "church of Christ," but have ceased to be concerned with Scriptural authority for their teaching or practice. What are faithful saints who are in a congregation whose elders and preacher are not at all concerned with abiding in the "old paths" to do? The Lord's answer is clear: "Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues" (Rev. 18:4).

One stated purpose for exiting such an institution is to avoid fellowship with its sins. One has fellowship with such a church by means of **financial support**....One who remains in such a church also has fellowship with its error and evils by means of **implicit endorsement**. In spite of energetic argument by the liberals, it is folly to deny the connection between **fellowship** and **endorsement**. If one participates with (for such is the definition of "fellowship") those who are teaching and practicing error, he is tacitly endorsing (agreeing with and encouraging) their error. He is lending his name and whatever influence for good he might have to efforts which oppose the Gospel. To remain a part of such a congregation is thereby a manifestation of support for it. This is why John wrote that we were neither to open our homes nor extend cordial greeting to false teachers, for to do so is to partake in (i.e., have fellowship with) their evil works (2 John 10-11).

All of the objections one might register to the elders and preacher concerning unscriptural doctrines and practices in a digressive church are rendered mute when one stays there in spite of them. In fact, somewhere along the line it becomes hypocritical to continue to object if: (1) it is seen that no repentance of the error and evil is forthcoming, and (2) the objector stays in spite of apostasy. The message of such behavior to liberal preachers and elders (and all other observers) is that the objector is not really very concerned after all.

Brethren who object to and do not agree with much of what is going on in the congregation of which they are members need to understand that merely registering an objection and then staying there is not enough. Like it or not, as long as one is a member of an apostate church he is **endorsing its apostasy!**³

When the leadership of a congregation has departed from the Truth and this departure has become obvious, there is very little (if anything) which can be done to bring the congregation back to the "old paths."⁴ Unity among God's people for which Jesus prayed requires

separation from those who are not in fellowship with God. The very basis for this unity is God's Word. Jesus prayed, "Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe on me through their word; That they all may be one" (John 17:20-21). The unity about which Jesus prayed was obtained "through their word." Truth unites, and Truth divides. Unity results among those who follow the Word; disunity (separation) results between those who follow the Word and those who do not. The church is after all "the called out," those who uniquely belong to God (Tit. 2:14), having severed their relationship with the world of sin. Unity among God's people requires disassociation from those who do not speak the same thing, who cause division, and are not of the same mind and judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

Ephesians 5

According to Paul even a little fellowship with evil is wrong (i.e., sinful). The inspired instruction is: "And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*" (Eph. 5:11). There is no such thing in God's view as "big F" and/or "little f" "levels of fellowship." God's Word knows nothing of Rubel Shelly's inventive terminology. The Bible does not teach the idea of fellowship based on "Gospel" and not on "doctrine." The source of this doctrine is Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett; it is the doctrine of men. Acceptance of such doctrines may increase our popularity among men; but remember what Paul said, "For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ" (Gal. 1:10). Believing these doctrines may be comforting now, but ultimately we will be lost because of them. God has drawn lines between those who love the Truth and obey it and those who reject the Truth. We must be careful not to have fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.

TREATMENT OF FALSE TEACHERS

In the New Testament we are told how to deal with false teachers. These very passages rule out continued association with them. It is impossible to obey God regarding false teachers and continue to associate with them. A preacher who claims to be faithful to God, sound in the faith, and insists that he can speak on unsound programs (e.g., Jubilee, Tulsa "Soul Winning" Workshop, ACU Lectures, etc.) is not faithful to God. Such association except to reprove and rebuke

is sin according to God's Word. A careful study of some of these passages will clearly show this to be the case.

2 John

John tells us that fellowship with error (specifically the false teacher) is endorsing and encouraging the error. The warning is:

If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine [i.e., the doctrine of Christ, that which Christ has authorized], receive him not into *your* house, neither bid him God speed: For he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds (2 John 10-11).

It is possible to become "partaker of other men's sins" (1 Tim. 5:22). Any "joint participation" with those who walk in darkness is itself sin. There is no middle ground except the ground of compromise. Those that do not gather with Christ by preaching, teaching, and living the Truth are scattering abroad (Mat. 12:30). These are the only two options. If a person is not with Christ, then he is opposed to Christ. We cannot walk with those in darkness and at the same time walk in the light ourselves. Endorsing and encouraging false teachers by our participation with them, by our words, or by our silence is wrong. We must be careful to avoid "guilt by association."

Romans 16

Regarding those who "cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine" of Christ, Paul tells us to "mark them" and "avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). We cannot avoid those with whom we continue to participate in lectureships, in congregational activities, or other joint activities. When we invite false teachers to come in to teach the congregation of which we are part, we are certainly not avoiding them. We are providing a place and opportunity for "spiritual wolves" to devour the flock with their false doctrines. When we agree to speak on programs (lectureships, etc.) with known false teachers without reproving or rebuking them, we are not avoiding them or marking them as God requires. We are sinning by disobeying God. God will hold us guilty by our association with these "spiritual wolves."

Brethren, we need to wake up! Jesus said, "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Mat. 12:30). We cannot "gather" for the Lord while working together with those who "scatter." Our association with the workers of darkness will be perceived by them and others to be endorsement of those

things that they do and teach. Brethren, if we desire God's approval, we cannot do so.

Paul did not ignore false teaching; he states emphatically, "mark them," and "turn away from them" (ASV).

This means refuse fellowship or it means nothing. The present day attitude of some, fellowship them regardless of what they teach, is a repudiation of this plain admonition. The doctrine of Christ unites. False doctrine divides.⁵

Titus 1

Paul tells Titus that elders by "holding fast the faithful word" must stop the mouths of those who are "teaching things which they ought not" (Tit. 1:9-11). This does not sound like inviting them in to preach to the flock that they oversee! Rather than treating them like faithful proclaimers of God's Word and associating with them as if they are harmless, their mouths are to be stopped and not given the opportunity to harm the people of God. Rather than ignored, they are to be stopped. Elders have a responsibility to protect the "sheep" under their charge from the deceitful ways of false teachers. Elders have the responsibility to keep the sheep separate from the wolves who will devour them.

One of the reasons that the Lord's church is being destroyed in so many places today is that the elders are not following God's Word in their treatment of false teachers. Too many elders are too impressed by "good words and fair speeches" (Rom. 16:18) and degrees and titles rather than "sound speech, that cannot be condemned" (Tit. 2:8). Too many elders are too concerned about numbers and popularity rather than faithfulness to God's Word. Elders need to be watchful and alert to the dangers of false teachers. Elders need to wake up to their God-given responsibility to stop the mouths of wolves and stop them from associating with God's people which will destroy them.

WHAT DOES WITHDRAWING FELLOWSHIP MEAN?

Apparently some of our liberal brethren do not believe in withdrawing fellowship from anyone. They believe in having fellowship with everyone whether a denominational false teacher or one who is supposed to be a member of the Lord's church but has left "the faith which was once delivered unto the saints" (Jude 3). Max Lucado, for example, has no problem collaborating with well-known denominational false teachers in books or with making public appearances with

them or in their church assemblies. Huge crowds of brethren assemble from around the country at the annual Tulsa Soul-Damning Workshop, Nashville Jubilee, ACU Lectureship and other similar forums in spite of the fact that the speakers for these programs are false teachers whose errors have been documented and exposed.

Promise Keepers attracts attention and involvement from many brethren in spite of their erroneous view of salvation by faith alone and their use of “altar calls,” their use of mechanical instruments in worship, and their belief in the direct operation of the Holy Spirit. The Promise Keepers is an un-biblical organization, but many brethren continue to see no harm in it. Some “big names” among us promote it, participate in it, and have spoken to its gatherings. However, such participation does not correct the errors; such participation is sinful because it is endorsement of error and “guilt by association.” A local preacher for a congregation of the church here in Aurora encouraged his congregation to attend a Promise Keepers gathering because Max Lucado would be there to speak. Max’s presence is an important reason for faithful brethren to stay away from such gatherings. Max is an honored writer among Baptists; he teaches via his radio program that baptism is not essential to salvation and that one may simply pray “the sinner’s prayer” to be saved; he teaches the denominational concept of the church by teaching that all sincere religious folks are on same “Fellow-ship,” just in separate compartments; he openly endorses denominational error by writing books and participating in unscriptural events such as Easter and Christmas; etc. Max Lucado is a false teacher! Endorsing him and encouraging the participation of other Christians in events simply because of his involvement speaks volumes. According to the adage, “Birds of a feather flock together.”

I have noticed that among those who see no lines of fellowship there seems to be no one that is not fellowshipped even if their doctrines and practices are extreme. Rubel’s bulletin recently carried this announcement: “Check out these Bible Class opportunities...Don Finto to Speak on Messianic Judiasm.” A self-proclaimed apostle (and good friend of Max Lucado) who has been marked and withdrawn from by all faithful brethren is invited to teach a “Bible Class” at Woodmont Hills! Churches of Christ in Nashville have long since disassociated themselves from the Belmont church where Don Finto reigns as an “apostle,” but now the Jubilee folks commend him and

provide him an opportunity to teach among them. This shows that they have no concept of the withdrawing of fellowship which is taught in the New Testament.

Brethren, we need to be careful about using articles in our bulletins written by false teachers. We need to be careful about announcing activities in other congregations where false teaching is accepted and false teachers are endorsed. We need to recognize we can become guilty of sin without becoming personally involved in the teaching of error. We can be guilty by our association with those who have departed from God's Way.

1 Corinthians 5

Paul tells the Corinthian brethren, "Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened" (1 Cor. 5:6-7). Paul clearly states that if the sin(ner) remains among them, others will become guilty by that association. The sinner is to be delivered to Satan so his soul might be saved and that the church might remain pure. Allowing the sinner to remain among the brethren enabled others to become polluted by that sin. Those who persist in sin must not continue in association with faithful Christians. Guilt comes sometimes from association. Fellowship must exist only among those who are in fellowship with God. Fellowship is limited to those who "walk in the light" by following God's Word. When a person persists in doing or teaching those things contrary to God's Word, there must of necessity be a break in the fellowship between that person and the faithful.

2 Thessalonians 3

The command of God is that the faithful withdraw "from every brother that walketh disorderly" (2 The. 3:6). This is not an optional matter; this is according to the command of the Lord Jesus Christ. Walking disorderly means to live without regard to the teachings of the New Testament, or to teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ. Withdrawing requires disassociating oneself from those who are no longer faithful to God. To refuse to withdraw from those is to become unfaithful ourselves. Continued fellowship with those from whom God said to withdraw is to make ourselves unfaithful and is to withdraw ourselves from the fellowship of God. We become guilty of sin by such continued association with those out of fellowship with God.

Titus 3

“A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself” (Tit. 3:10-11). Rejecting the heretic requires a discontinuation of our association with him. Why is God so concerned about our association with such a person? It is because of the effects of such association. The innocent becomes guilty through continued association. The false teacher must be rejected by the faithful. The faithful are in danger because of association with such characters. The false teacher must be noted (marked) and rejected.

2 Timothy 3

When Paul warns against the “perilous times” of the “last days” (which began on the day of Pentecost following the Lord’s ascension and will continue to the end of the world), he concludes with these words: “Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away” (2 Tim. 3:5). His warning involves not only turning away from the sins that are mentioned in the preceding verses, but also turning away from those who practice such sins. Paul warned us not to participate in these sins and not to continue to associate closely with those who practice them. Association with those who practice evil must stop if one desires to be faithful to God. We can become guilty of sin if we continue in that association.

CONCLUSION

After studying the Scriptures, it should be obvious that “guilt by association” is something that God recognizes as true and repeatedly warns us against it. Those who refuse to recognize this truth and who continue to associate and fellowship those who have departed from the Truth will surely reap the consequences. God will hold them accountable for their souls and the souls of those that they have influenced away from God’s Word.

ENDNOTES

¹*The Bible Commentary*, ed. F. C. Cook (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1981), 4:173.

²F. B. Meyer, *Choice Notes on the Psalms* (Grand Rapids, MI: Kregel Publications, 1984), p. 11.

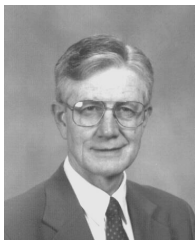
³Dub McClish, “Come Forth, My People—4,” *The Edifier*, May 17, 1990, p. 2.

⁴Bill Jackson, “Not Once in 2000 YEARS!” *Matters of THE Faith*, Oct.-Dec., 1995, pp. 6-7.

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MAY ONE CONGREGATION WITHDRAW FROM ANOTHER?

Dub McClish



Dub McClish is a native Texan, the son of a Gospel preacher, grandson of an elder, father of a Gospel preacher, and son-in-law of a Gospel preacher. He attended Freed-Hardeman College and received a B.A. degree from Abilene Christian College. He has done local work in Idaho, Texas, Alabama, Kentucky, and New Mexico. Dub is a well known author, editor, debater, publisher, and speaker who has preached the Gospel in several states, Jamaica, Singapore, the Philippines, Thailand, and Indonesia. He has delivered special lectures at Southwest School of Bible Studies, Houston College of the Bible, Southern Sumatra Bible College (Indonesia), and Brown Trail Preacher Training School. He is on the advisory staff of *Firm Foundation* and has contributed numerous articles in various brotherhood publications as well as hundreds of bulletin articles and chapters in over one hundred books. He has extensive radio preaching experience.

Since 1982 he has directed the Annual Denton Lectures and has edited the Annual Denton Lectureship books. On September 1, 1992, he began a new work under the oversight of the Pearl Street elders (Denton, Texas), devoting full-time to preaching in gospel meetings, mission trips, lectureships, and in writing and publishing sound biblical materials. He is President of Valid Publications, Inc.

Dub is married to the former Lavonne James and they have three children: Bronwen, Hal, and Andy, and seven grandchildren.

INTRODUCTION¹

A certain city of 15,000 people has two congregations which have the name “Church of Christ” on their buildings. Congregation “A” has eight hundred members; congregation “B” two hundred. For the past fifteen years congregation “A” has become progressively “softer” in its teaching and has emphasized social issues more and more. It has consistently used guest preachers who are on the cutting-edge of liberal thought on such subjects as verbal inspiration of the Bible, the distinctiveness of the church, scriptural worship, the necessity of baptism, fellowship, divorce and remarriage, and such like. Its preacher joined the local ministerial alliance a few years ago and has no problem joining with the denominations in their “Easter” and “Christmas” celebrations. He willingly sits on the platform with the

denominational “pastors” and sings hymns to the moaning of their organs at such affairs. He has already swapped pulpits with some of these “pastors.” Congregation “A” has begun to accept members from denominational groups which either practice sprinkling or which practice immersion while denying the necessity of the act for salvation.

Congregation “B” has elders who are determined that the church they oversee will submit to the authority of the Scriptures in all that it does and teaches. This congregation has become increasingly uncomfortable with the behavior of its sister congregation across town. The elders of “B” have expressed their concerns to the elders of “A” more than once, only to receive denials that they have changed or to be told (in a polite way, of course) to mind their own business. Finally, congregation “B” cannot tolerate being identified with congregation “A” any longer. Everyone in town can see that “A” is much different from “B” (even though they do not realize why). The townspeople applaud the obvious “new” attitude of change, syncretism, and tolerance they can see in “A” which has made it largely indistinguishable from their own denominations, except for the name, “Church of Christ” which is still on the building. The elders of “B” want to maintain their scriptural identity and distinguish themselves from “A” for the sake of the members of “B,” for the sake of members of “A” who might be salvaged, and for the sake of their fellow-citizens.

The elders of “B” fully recognize that the practices and doctrines of “A” are heretical and unauthorized and that they have forfeited their scriptural identity. They would like to lead “B” in withdrawing fellowship from “A,” announcing this action alike to the congregation, to the elders of “A,” and to the city by means of a newspaper announcement. However, the preacher at congregation “B” has convinced the elders that there is no scriptural authority for one church to withdraw from another. They therefore have resigned themselves to the idea that they are helpless to do anything more about their predicament. Since “B” cannot publicly withdraw from “A,” the whole town assumes that “B” is in agreement with “A” and that “A” represents what the church of Christ is everywhere. The cause of Truth and righteousness suffer mightily, error has a field day, and the devil gains a distinct advantage.

If it is wrong now for one church to withdraw from another, it has always been wrong to do so. Please read on. Do we owe the people in the Independent Christian and the Disciples of Christ denominations a long-overdue apology? From approximately 1875 through 1906 hundreds of congregations that were once true to the old paths of authorized worship and work adopted the mechanical instrument in their worship and the missionary society in their work. As they did so one by one, they apostatized and lost their identity as churches of Christ. Congregations which refused these innovations marked, dissociated themselves from, and ceased their fellowship with those churches that adopted them. By 1906 the apostasy was so apparent that the federal census recognized the churches of Christ and the Christian Church (which since 1926 has been composed of the Disciples and the Independents) as separate entities. Many (perhaps most) of those “progressive” congregations wore (and some still wear) the name “Church of Christ.” Not only should we apologize to these apostate sects, but while we are at it, we should also censure, even at this late date, our spiritual forebears in the congregations that dared do the withdrawing. They had no scriptural right to do so **because one church cannot withdraw from another church!**

The previous paragraph is written with admitted (and we trust obvious) sarcasm and irony in an effort to emphasize what this writer believes to be an unfounded (dare we say “absurd”?) position. The preacher of congregation “B” above and the last clause of the preceding paragraph represent the teaching of some otherwise faithful brethren among us, namely that one church cannot withdraw from another. **If** this contention is correct, the elders of congregation “B” above cannot even tell those under their oversight to have no fellowship with congregation “A.” **If** this contention is correct, we should indeed censure our faithful brethren of yore. **If** this contention is correct, we would most certainly owe those in the two-fold Christian Church denomination a genuine apology for the mistreatment they received. Furthermore, **if** this contention is correct, consistency would demand that we actually restore fellowship and work hand in hand with them!

Do the Scriptures authorize, explicitly or implicitly, one congregation withdrawing from another? This is a relevant question for every age because of the possibility of apostasy on the part of entire congre-

gations in every age, including the first century (Rev. 2-3). We have for some years been in the midst of a vast apostasy among the Lord's people, fostered by a veritable conspiracy of liberals among us who are bent on "dumbing down" the scriptural identity of the body of Christ to make it fit the mold of human religious orders. With hundreds of congregations already swept away in the current digression, the question before us is particularly appropriate for our time. Let us study the subject of withdrawing fellowship, especially as it pertains to this question.

SOME BASIC CONCEPTS CONCERNING FELLOWSHIP IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

Obtaining and Maintaining Fellowship

Since detailed discussion of such concepts as the definition of New Testament fellowship, how spiritual fellowship with others is obtained, and how it is maintained may be found elsewhere in this volume, only brief mention will be made of them here. Our English word "fellowship" translates the Greek word *koinonia*, found in both noun and verb forms in the New Testament. It has to do with sharing things in common, joint participation, partnership, and like ideas. The basis of fellowship among men is their common fellowship with Deity: "Yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (1 John 1:3). Only when two or more people have established fellowship with God and His Son can they thereby be in fellowship with each other.

Men are sinners (Rom. 6:23), and sin separates men from God and His perfect holiness (Isa. 59:1-2). Through His sacrifice on the cross Christ has made it possible for men to be reconciled to God ("that he might bring us to God," 1 Pet. 3:18). This establishment of fellowship is possible only when man is freed from the guilt of his sins, which is accomplished when the penitent believer repents and is baptized in order to receive forgiveness (Acts 2:37-38). This statement is true because the Lord has chosen the act of immersion in water (based upon the appropriate precedents) as the act in which He washes the sinner of his sins in the cleansing blood of Christ (Acts 22:16; Rev. 1:5; Rom. 6:3). Some three thousand people responded to the Pentecost preaching in this very way (Acts 2:41), and they are immediately described as being and continuing in fellowship with each other (Acts

2:42). By this means men enter into fellowship with God and thereby with one another.

However, continuing in fellowship with God and with other men is not a given—men can forfeit their fellowship with God. Note the conditionality of John’s statement of this fact:

If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] and walk in the 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 his Son cleanseth us from all sin (1 John 1:6-7).

Note the following: (1) Remaining in fellowship with God is dependent upon one’s “walking in the light,” a metaphor meaning faithful obedience to the Word of God. (2) Only as two or more people continue to live lives which are obedient to God, thereby enjoying His fellowship, do these persons continue to “have fellowship one with another.” (3) It is possible to lose one’s fellowship with God (and thus his fellowship with all others who are in fellowship with God), or John’s statement is meaningless.

When persons in the same geographical location are obedient to the Truth, cleansed of their sins, come into fellowship with God and with one another, they constitute the Lord’s people (the church) in that location. The three thousand who came into fellowship with God and each other on Pentecost were at the same time “added to the church” (Acts 2:47, KJV) and were thereafter “the church which was in Jerusalem” (Acts 8:1; 11:22; cf., 15:4). The same was true in Antioch of Syria (Acts 11:26; 13:1), Antioch of Pisidia, Lystra, and Derbe (Acts 14:23), and likewise in every place on the New Testament map where the seed of the kingdom bore its fruit (cf., Acts 20:17; 1 Cor. 1:2; Col. 4:15-16; 1 The. 1:1; et al.). It has ever since remained so as the Lord continues to add saved ones to His church.

Obviously the individuals within these respective congregations had fellowship with the other members thereof, even as we do presently. But in addition these **congregations**, though separated by hundreds or thousands of miles, also had fellowship with each other, **as congregations**. When the Jerusalem Church heard of the church in Antioch of Syria, she extended her fellowship by sending the good man Barnabas to assist them (Acts 11:22-24). A bit later the church in Antioch expressed its fellowship with the Jerusalem Church and other Judean congregations by sending a financial contribution to their

needs (Acts 11:27-30). Various congregations had fellowship with the Corinthian Church by supplying Paul's support while he worked there (2 Cor. 11:8). This fellowship between congregations is also seen in the bounty Paul gathered from many congregations in the Gentile provinces to meet the needs of the Jerusalem Church (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9). The churches in the provinces had fellowship with each other, and they all had fellowship with the Jerusalem Church. Surely none would question the existence of fellowship among the New Testament congregations. Such fellowship between faithful congregations of the Lord's people continues to the present.

Fellowship Can Be Forfeited and Withdrawn

In light of the foregoing, particularly the statement from 1 John 1:6-7, one should not be surprised that the New Testament has much to say about the forfeiture of fellowship. The warnings of apostasy are many and frequent. Likewise, the instructions which relate to dealing with impenitent, sinful brethren are plain and profuse. These passages have to do with what may appropriately be called "corrective church discipline," and they relate directly to the withdrawal of fellowship from such brethren.

In one sense almost the entire New Testament has to do with spiritual discipline—bringing and keeping the flesh and spirit under control of the Word of God so the soul may be saved at last. However, there are at least sixty-eight verses that relate directly to the corrective side of spiritual discipline, in which are specified a wide range of sins (if unrepented of) that cannot be ignored. The requirement of us to withdraw fellowship from such erring brethren is principally based upon the fact that such ones have already forfeited their fellowship with God. We must make a choice: If we would remain in fellowship with God, we cannot remain in fellowship with such brethren. The reader's attention is called to a few of these at this juncture with the promise that many others will be referred to later.

The Lord spoke as follows:

And if thy brother sin against thee, go, show him his fault between thee and him alone: if he hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he hear *thee* not, take with thee one or two more, that at the mouth of two witnesses or three every word may be established. And if he refuse to hear them, tell it unto the church: and if he refuse to hear the

church also, let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

Paul penned a very plain statement to the Romans on this subject:

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them that are causing the divisions and occasions of stumbling, contrary to the doctrine which ye learned: and turn away from them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Christ, but their own belly; and by their smooth and fair speech they beguile the hearts of the innocent (Rom. 16:17-18).

Paul's imperative statement to the Thessalonian Church is also explicit:

Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which they received of us...And if any man obeyeth not our word by this epistle, note that man, that ye have no company with him, to the end that he may be ashamed. And yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 The. 3:6, 14-15).

Although John is popularly called the "apostle of love," he did not shrink from writing clearly on this subject:

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works (2 John 9-11).

We call attention to some bold, crucial terms in the foregoing passages: "Let him be unto thee as the Gentile and the publican," "mark...turn away from," "we command...that ye withdraw yourselves" "receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting." Many other passages forcefully and clearly set forth the responsibility for exercising corrective discipline (e.g., 1 Tim. 1:3-4, 19-20; 6:20-21; 2 Tim. 3:8-9; Tit. 1:9-11; 3:10-11; et al.). The entirety of 1 Corinthians 5 is devoted to this sobering subject.

Undeniably, the Lord's people are taught to keep the church pure by the withdrawal of fellowship. The teaching is so clear that no reasonably intelligent person can fail to grasp it. No excuse warrants our neglect of this responsibility when circumstances demand it. If human laws are enacted against it, we must serve the higher law of God. If judges rule against it, we must still submit to the Judge of

judges. With the courageous apostles we must take our stand: “We must obey God rather than men” (Acts 5:29).

SINS THAT DEMAND WITHDRAWAL OF FELLOWSHIP

Doctrinal Errors

Numerous passages not only warn of doctrinal errors, but they specify the exercise of discipline upon those who teach them. Timothy was to “charge certain men not to teach a different doctrine” (1 Tim. 1:3). Hymenaeus and Alexander, who had made “shipwreck concerning the faith” were to be “delivered unto Satan” (a reference to their being expelled from the fellowship of the saints in Ephesus) (1 Tim. 1:19-20). The Ephesians had to turn away from certain others because they “erred concerning the faith” (1 Tim. 6:20-21). Hymenaeus and Philetus had to be shunned because they were destroying the faith of others by teaching that the resurrection had already occurred (2 Tim. 2:16-18). Elders are charged with the task of stopping the mouths of and sharply reproving gainsayers, vain talkers, deceivers, teachers of fables and commandments of men, and those who turn away from the Truth (Tit. 1:9-14). As earlier noted, those who promote teaching contrary to that of the apostles and who beguile the hearts of the innocent are to be marked and turned away from (Rom. 16:17-18). Also, as previously mentioned, those who do not abide in the things which Christ taught are not to be given our hospitality or even greeted in such a way as to be encouraged in their false teaching (2 John 9-11). Clearly, false teachers who cannot be reclaimed for the Truth are to be withdrawn from.

Ungodly Division

We specify “**ungodly** division” because some division is approved of, yea, demanded by, God. In fact, when a brother or sister must be withdrawn from, a division between that person and the church occurs, but it is one that God demands. Ungodly, unauthorized division includes (1) one who commits a personal offense against a brother and will not repent (Mat. 18:15-17), (2) one who causes “divisions and occasions of stumbling” by his false doctrine (Rom. 16:17-18), (3) those who seek to “overthrow whole houses” by vain speech and deception (Tit. 1:9-11; cf., Acts. 20:29-31), (4) one who is “factious” (a “heretick,” KJV) (Tit. 3:10).

Miscellaneous Causes

The New Testament's lengthiest treatment of corrective discipline is aimed primarily at the sin of fornication (1 Cor. 5:1-9). However, the same passage also enjoins disciplinary treatment of those who are covetous, idolaters, revilers (those who verbally abuse others), drunkards, and extortioners (1 Cor. 5:11). A text earlier noticed commands the church to withdraw from the "disorderly," from a Greek term used especially in a military context to denote those who break rank or who are insubordinate (2 The. 3:6). Paul uses the term here to describe those "that work not at all, but are busybodies" (2 The. 3:11), but it is a broad term capable of referring to any conduct that expresses rebellion against the Word of God. Likewise, those who would not obey Paul's word by means of this letter were to be marked by and refused the company of the faithful (2 The. 3:14). The elders in Crete were to discipline the "unruly," a term referring to those who were undisciplined, disobedient, rebellious. (A brother who will not discipline himself must be disciplined by his brethren.) Again, we have a term broad enough to include any sort of impenitent departure from Truth and righteousness.

So far as we know, faithful brethren down through the years have all but universally given at least lip-service to the fact that the New Testament explicitly enjoins the practice of withdrawal of fellowship from somebody by somebody! (Unfortunately, there have been relatively few congregations that have found the spiritual fortitude to execute it.) But to whom do these instructions apply? Who is to execute them? Are these instructions limited either to congregational action toward its members alone or to individual saints and their behavior toward other individuals? Those who deny that one congregation can either mark or identify and withdraw fellowship from another congregation are forced to limit every passage that orders withdrawal of the disorderly to this application. But do they have any application to broader relations of fellowship, particularly to relationships between congregations of the Lord's people? Do faithful congregations have the right (not to say for the moment, the duty) to publicly identify and withdraw fellowship from unfaithful, apostate congregations? Here we come to the real burden of this chapter.

SOME SCRIPTURES AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS CONCERNING INTER-CONGREGATIONAL RELATIONS

Acts 9:26

“And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.” This passage describes the attempt by Saul of Tarsus to “place membership” with the Jerusalem Church when he returned to the city for the first time since his conversion. He was converted in Damascus and was a member of the congregation there (vv. 10-25). The congregation in Jerusalem refused to extend fellowship to him till Barnabas, whom they knew well and trusted, vouched for him (vv. 27-29). Admittedly, the brethren in Jerusalem erred in their assessment of this individual case involving Saul, but will anyone argue that they erred in principle? Does a congregation not have the right to question the faithfulness of one who seeks to join himself to it? Must elders of a congregation accept anyone without question who seeks membership? Barnabas did not question the right of the Jerusalem brethren to reject Saul or anyone else who sought membership in the congregation. He only testified to the genuineness of Saul’s conversion and dedication, proving that he was worthy of their fellowship. Remember, Saul was not a member of the Jerusalem Church but of that in Damascus. It would appear from this case that a **congregation** can take action involving the refusal of fellowship against one who is a member of another **congregation**.

Acts 15:22-23

Then it seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men out of their company, and send them to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; *namely*, Judas called Barsabbas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren: and they wrote *thus* by them, The apostles and the elders, brethren, unto the brethren who are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia, greeting.

Admittedly the letter which follows in verses 24-29 had the authority of apostolic wisdom behind it. However, this does not alter the following facts: (1) “and elders, with the whole church,” (v. 22; cf., v. 23) in Jerusalem were plainly identified as participants in sending it. (2) The letter from the church in Jerusalem was sent not only to the church in Antioch, but to the several congregations in Syria and Cilicia (v. 23). (3) It is not intrinsically wrong for one congregation to

be concerned about the doctrinal stance and practice of another congregation. (4). It is not intrinsically wrong for one church to write a letter of warning and admonition to another congregation that may be in danger of succumbing to error.

Romans 16:17-18

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Will anyone argue that this injunction to mark and turn away from false teachers who caused division applied **only if such were members** of the Roman Church? If so, then it must follow that it would be permissible for them to embrace Judaizing teachers who might come from Jerusalem or false teachers from some other congregation(s). If a congregation may refuse to extend fellowship to and may warn others about the apostasy of one person who is part of another congregation (as demonstrated by the implications of the passage above), may a congregation do the same concerning two or three apostate members from elsewhere? If so, may the congregation do so concerning two or three dozen? Why does it then become wrong if it is done to a congregation of two or three hundred? If congregations may not withdraw and/or withhold their fellowship from any but their own local members, then congregations are left without defense against identity with and/or attack from one or one hundred apostates from without! As in the case of Saul and the Jerusalem Church, so in this passage it is implied that a **congregation** can take action involving the refusal of fellowship against one who is a member of another **congregation**.

1 Corinthians 10:20-21

But *I say*, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to demons, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have communion with demons. Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of demons: ye cannot partake of the table of the Lord, and of the table of demons.

This passage demonstrates that it is wrong for one person in the Corinthian Church (thus for the whole church) to have fellowship with one demon (thus, with a church composed of or devoted to

demons). It is thus mandatory that a church have no fellowship with a church not in fellowship with God. This being so, how can it be wrong for a church to identify or mark a church of demons and announce that it has no fellowship with it? “But the ‘Church of Demons’ in Corinth never was in fellowship with God,” someone demurs. True, but suppose it had once been in fellowship with God and drifted into demonism? Would this mean that the faithful congregation could not then mark it and disfellowship it? If so, the logic behind this conclusion is mysterious in the extreme!

2 Corinthians 6:14-18

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

This passage indicates that it is possible (though displeasing to God) for saints to be in an unequal and unholy fellowship with unbelievers. This letter was written to the “church of God which is at Corinth” (1:1); so it most certainly applies to congregational as well as to individual relationships. Does not this passage forbid both congregations and individual saints from forming or maintaining an alliance or fellowship with any person or group (congregation) of persons that would adversely affect one’s loyalty to Christ and His Word? If this be the case, it must follow that just as an individual saint can (yea, must) withdraw from any such fellowship, so must a group or congregation of saints so do in order to follow Paul’s edict.

2 Corinthians 11:28

“Besides those things that are without, there is that which presseth upon me daily, anxiety for all the churches.” The New Testament knows nothing of “dislocated” members—all were members of a local congregation of the Lord’s people. Even Paul, who traveled the Empire, had a “home” congregation—Antioch of Syria—to which he returned again and again with the reports of his labors (Acts 11:25-30; 13:1-3; 14:26-28; 18:22). We are certainly to have great loyalty for

the congregation of which we are members, supporting it and working as part of it, in every way possible. However, local church loyalty in no way precludes concern for “all the churches,” as seen in Paul’s statement. Exclusive loyalty to a local congregation is an expression of spiritual myopia, provincialism, isolationism, and is selfish to the maximum. If individual saints may/should have concern for sister congregations, how can it possibly be wrong for an entire congregation to have concern for other congregations? Would not this concern include not only an interest in their progress and growth, but also an interest in their soundness in doctrine or practice?

Ephesians 5:11

“And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather even reprove them.” Of course, this command applies to individual saints in the Ephesian Church and their relationship to other individuals in their immediate circumstances. However, as with Romans 16:17-18, it is utterly arbitrary to limit the application and implication of this imperative to individuals, as if **congregations** are somehow exempt from them. Are there those who are willing to affirm that God forbids His individual children to have fellowship with individuals engrossed in darkness and commands them to reprove such, but that He desires **congregations** of His people to fellowship and forbids them to reprove other **congregations** who are in the realm of darkness? We are willing to affirm that this passage applies to a single saint or to a congregation of two hundred saints. It is never right for God’s people—in whatever numbers—to have fellowship with evil. Contrariwise, it is ever right for God’s people—in whatever numbers—to reprove evil. The number of people involved has nothing whatsoever to do with the implementation of the command!

1 John 4:1

“Beloved, believe not every spirit, but prove the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets are gone out into the world.” John wrote this epistle to Christians “in general” rather than to a specific individual or church. The passage above has to do with preachers and what they preached. The message of the preachers was (and is) to be put on trial to determine if it was (is) from God. Obviously, it was not merely the preacher in a local congregation who was

to be thus proved by its members. Rather, John warns of many false prophets that have “gone out into the world,” referring to men who might come to them from afar. Hence, John has in mind **any and every** preacher that might come to them or that they might go to hear. The entire purpose of the proving would be to believe or disbelieve him, to accept him or reject him, to extend fellowship to or withhold/withdraw fellowship from him. This passage proves that a **congregation** may sit in holy judgment of and identify and reject as a false teacher one who was not a member of that **congregation**.

2 John 7, 9-11

For many deceivers are gone forth into the world, *even* they that confess not that Jesus Christ cometh in the flesh....Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into *your* house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works.

Although John addressed his second letter to an “elect lady and her children” (v. 1), it is still universally classified as a “general epistle.” Notice that John warned about the many deceivers who were circulating and strictly charged that such were not to be given hospitality or greeting (equivalents of fellowship). To do so would be tantamount to partaking in their evil deeds. Again, this reaches far beyond merely a false teacher who might be a member of a local congregation, as indicated by the universal expressions, “gone forth into the world” (v. 7), “whosoever” (v. 9), and “any one” (v. 10) in reference to him. It is very likely that John refers to traveling preachers from distant congregations, rather than to members of the congregation where this dear Christian lady lived. “But this was written to an individual, rather than a congregation,” someone avers. What is the point of such a statement except to imply that while **individuals** should not entertain and greet (so as to endorse) false teachers (who are not members of the local congregation), the **congregation** as a whole may do so?

Revelation 2:5

“Remember therefore whence thou art fallen, and repent and do the first works; or else I come to thee, and will move thy candlestick out of its place, except thou repent.” The reader is reminded that the Son of God is the author of these words in His letter to the church in

Ephesus. If she did not repent, the Lord warned that He would withdraw fellowship from her, as implied by the threat to “move thy candlestick.” “But the fact that the Lord could take this action does not mean that a congregation can,” someone may object. All right, let us test this objection. Suppose Ephesus did not repent and the Lord identified her as an apostate church which He could not fellowship. What should the faithful churches of Asia do? Would they please the Lord by continuing to fellowship her or by refusing to withdraw fellowship from her? Would they displease the Lord by following His example and withdrawing fellowship from her? To insist that one congregation cannot identify another congregation as apostate (and thereupon withdraw fellowship from it) is to insist that it is unscriptural to follow the example of the Lord Himself!

MISCELLANEOUS CONSIDERATIONS

Besides the principles drawn from the foregoing passages, there are some additional ones that bear on the question of congregation-to-congregation withdrawal of fellowship. While some of these principles may somewhat overlap some of those already mentioned, we want to give more specific attention to them.

Congregations Can Recognize and Extend Fellowship to Each Other

This premise has already been established on the basis of (1) the fellowship extended by Jerusalem to Antioch (Acts 11:20-23), (2) the fellowship reciprocated by Antioch toward Jerusalem and the Judean churches (Acts 11:27-30), and (3) the fellowship between the churches in the provinces with one another and with the congregation in Jerusalem (Rom. 15:25-27; 1 Cor. 16:1-2; 2 Cor. 8-9). Besides these obvious examples, we may further observe without fear of successful contradiction that fellowship between the congregations described in the New Testament is implicit in the very nature of the case.

It is axiomatic that if churches can scripturally **express the fellowship** that exists between them (because of their common loyalty to God’s Word) in gestures of both edification and benevolence (as demonstrated above), they likewise can scripturally **express the cessation of fellowship** when a congregation apostatizes. If this conclusion does not follow, we are unable to understand why. In the

judgment of this writer, this one principle is sufficient to settle the issue and answer the question.

Congregational Membership Is a Moot Issue

As individual Christians we must certainly obey in our daily lives the commands to identify and withdraw from those who rebel against the Lord. Likewise, congregations must execute these commands against unruly and disorderly members which are among them. Do these mandates end at the “congregational borders”? We say they do not. Consider the following hypothesis: Fifty members of a congregation desire the use of an organ in worship so strongly that they are willing to divide the church if necessary to have it. The elders have withstood them and are preparing to lead the church in withdrawing fellowship from them. However, before this is done, the group leaves and starts a new congregation six blocks away. What now? According to some, they are now protected, as the faithful church they have left is powerless to do anything but accept them as a sister congregation! But let us take it a step further. What if the fifty liberals had been withdrawn from **before** they started their own outfit? Does the faithful church now have to reinstate fellowship with them? According to some (if they are consistent in their contention on this subject) this action would have to be taken.

The issue of fellowship withdrawal does not turn upon congregational membership, **but upon fidelity to the Lord and His Word and upon the meaning of fellowship itself**. When a brother or a congregation forfeits its fellowship with God by either religious or moral error, he/it forfeits his/its fellowship with all of those who are still in fellowship with God. Moreover, God has decreed (as shown from numerous inspired statements) that those who have thus fallen from God’s fellowship are to be identified as apostate and consequently turned away from by those still in fellowship with Him. It matters not whether the apostasy is in only one brother or sister in a local congregation or an entire congregation across town or in another city, state, or nation—the principle is precisely the same!

The Identity and Purity of the Church Must Be Considered

The overriding purpose of corrective spiritual discipline is to reclaim the one or ones who have strayed (1 Cor. 5:5; 2 The. 3:14), and this should be the aim of marking and withdrawing from an entire

congregation. However, there are other scriptural purposes as well. One of these is to purify the church and protect its purity and identity as the people of God. Thus, the Corinthians were ordered to “purge out” the fornicator and his sin because “a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump” (1 Cor. 5:6-7). If a false teacher or an immoral saint is allowed to retain respectability, such will have a corrupting influence on the rest of the church. Not only so, but such behavior will be identified with the church by those of the world.

The local church cannot protect and preserve its own purity if it harbors rank sin in its bosom. It must make the scriptural options clear to the apostate brother—his repentance or his expulsion from their fellowship. Neither can a faithful congregation protect and preserve its own pure reputation and identity as the church of Christ in a community if it does not make the same scriptural options clear to the liberal, digressive, apostate congregation that may be on the other side of town and that is still dishonestly displaying the name, “Church of Christ,” on its building. Neglect or refusal of a faithful church to do this constitutes dereliction of duty to its own members, to the heretical group, and to those outside the church.

OBJECTIONS CONSIDERED

Those who aver that there is no scriptural authority for one congregation to withdraw fellowship from another offer certain objections to the practice, principal among which are the following:

There Is No Explicit Command for One Congregation To Withdraw from Another

There are many things we recognize as scripturally authorized on the basis of implicit, rather than explicit, teaching (e.g., building or buying a place for the church to assemble, the use of song books, the use of a public address system, utilizing radio and television to preach the gospel, et al.). Have some of these brethren forgotten that what the Bible authorizes implicitly is just as authoritative as what it authorizes explicitly? The implications are clear that impenitent apostate brethren are to be marked and refused fellowship by the faithful, whether the apostate be an individual or a congregation full of apostates. This “no explicit command” ruse smacks of an “anti” approach to scriptural authority and is hardly worthy of notice. However, men desperate to uphold an untenable position will often grasp at straws.

For One Church To Withdraw from Another Violates Congregational Autonomy

The Scriptures indeed teach the principle that each congregation is to be a self-governing entity under the oversight of its own elders (Acts 20:28-31). However, we are interested in knowing just how local congregational authority is violated when a faithful congregation urges a sister congregation to repent of its rebellion against Heaven and then marks it and withdraws from it when it refuses. Has the one congregation made any law which it seeks to impose on the other? Has the action of the faithful, withdrawing church robbed the heretical group of its ability to choose and act as it pleases? Not at all, in either case. As above, this has been one of the favorite allegations of those of the “anti” persuasion for almost half a century as they have opposed congregational cooperation. Ironically, some are now using the same baseless objection to oppose the practice of congregational “discooperation” (withdrawal of fellowship)!

There Are Some in the Worst Congregation Who Are Innocent of Error

We are willing to admit that some are innocent in perhaps most of the apostate congregations now extant—it may be so in all of them. However, such has been true in many situations in which God “disfellowshipped” an entire group of people. He knows that punishment of the wicked will often bring suffering to the innocent as well (Exo. 20:5). There were righteous people in the corrupt church at Sardis (Rev. 3:1-6), and those who claim that a whole church cannot be disfellowshipped like to emphasize this fact, as though it helps their cause. The “argument” then follows that to withdraw from the whole congregation would mean withdrawal from some who were faithful.

Notice first that we dare not isolate the material written to the seven churches of Asia from all of the other relevant New Testament teaching regarding error, repentance, and fellowship. Notice also that the purpose of the letters to the churches of Asia was to assess their spiritual condition and to call upon the majority of them to repent or be disowned by the Lord. There was thus a period of reprieve to see if they were going to repent, during which the faithful might still remain there and work to bring about repentance. However, from the balance

of New Testament teaching we must conclude that if those called “faithful” remained in Sardis after their time of probation, they would be disfellowshipped by the Lord along with the rest. The principle is clearly enunciated later in the Revelation. When the destruction of Babylon the great was imminent because of her iniquities, a heavenly voice cried, “Come forth, my people, out of her, that ye have no fellowship with her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues” (Rev. 18:4). It is all the more reason to mark and withdraw from a congregation that has gone astray, that the innocent may be so alerted and alarmed that they will flee the wicked place. To point to the righteous in a wicked congregation is seen to be no argument at all, but merely another quibble in order to somehow avoid the duty to withdraw from apostate congregations.

CONCLUSION

It is not only a scriptural right, but a duty, to withdraw from erring brethren, regardless of the spiritual relationship involved, including individual-individual, individual-congregation, congregation-individual, and **congregation-congregation** relationships. Any one who would forbid one congregation to withdraw fellowship from another (when its apostasy justifies it) legislates where God has not done so.

When a church so compromises the Truth that it is no longer recognizable as a church of Christ, how can faithful sister congregations fail to mark it and refuse to withdraw fellowship from it and still be faithful to God?

ENDNOTE

¹A few statements in this chapter originally appeared in slightly different form in the author's chapter in *Studies in 1 and 2 Thessalonians and Philemon* (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1988), pp. 338-357.

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FELLOWSHIP AND THE HOLY SPIRIT

Keith A. Mosher, Sr.



Keith Mosher, Sr. and his wife Dorothy have been married for thirty-one years. They have three children; Keith, Jr., Mark, and Karen, and three grandchildren.

He is a 1975 graduate of Memphis School of Preaching and has B. A., M.A., and M.Th. degrees from Southern Christian University and the Doctor of Ministry from Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has worked with congregations in Mississippi and Tennessee. Keith speaks at gospel meetings and lectureships throughout the states. He has done mission work in Asia and Africa. He is a full-time instructor at Memphis School of Preaching and currently serves as Dean of Academics.

Keith has written two workbooks on Romans and Acts, a tract entitled "Can One Trust His English Bible?" and articles for various publications. He is a staff writer for *Bible Light* and has recently finished a book on inspiration.

PREFACE

The subject of "Christian Fellowship" is especially a timely one in view of all that is being said recently. (Some of "us" are even fellowshipping denominations, and some are fellowshipping the "fellowshippers" by going along with them and without rebuking them—Eph. 5:11.) Brother Hatcher and the elders of the Bellview congregation deserve grateful praise from the brotherhood for designing a lectureship series that takes a loving stand on Bible principles concerning fellowship—even fellowship and doctrine about the Holy Spirit.

I, personally, write my brief essay and minor contribution to this lectureship with a troubled heart. I am concerned about some things being said about the activities of the Holy Spirit, but I am torn by my love for and respect for those publicizing what I believe is error. I will probably be labeled a "coward" by some and "harsh and unloving" by others who will read this study or hear the oral presentation. But, I intend to insist that only that error that condemns a soul (2 John 9-11)

is to be considered a matter for removal of one's fellowship or is a matter that would remove one from fellowship with God (1 John 1:7).

I trust that all who read this chapter will realize that the subject of the Holy Spirit, especially His working in a Christian's life, has ever been a bone of contention. For example, brother Gus Nichols did not agree with brother Guy N. Woods as to the "gift of the Spirit" (Acts 2:38). Yet, brethren Nichols and Woods were "in fellowship." Why? This latter question is the purpose of this study.

INTRODUCTION

The root of the term from which arises the Greek word translated fellowship is *koinos*.¹ This latter word meant "common" and originally indicated joint ownership of something.² The term eventually evolved to *koinonos* meaning "fellow" or "participant."³ *Koinonos* required another term (usually a noun) to indicate the kind of participation shared.⁴ The abstract of *koinonos* is *koinonia* which latter term implies a two-sided relationship that has an especially close bond.⁵

Following are several usages of *koinos*. (1) Luke 5:10, where the translation is "**partakers**." (2) Hebrews 2:14, where it is reported of men that they share a common mortality; that is, men are "**partakers** of flesh and blood." (3) 2 Peter 1:4 contains the thought that children of God are "**partakers** of the divine nature." This fellowship of saints with the divine nature has an **exclusive** quality (2 Cor. 6:14-17). Fellowship with God demands all separation from whatever is sin (Rev. 18:4). (4) 1 Corinthians 1:9 is the record from Paul that all Christians are called into fellowship with Christ by the Father (and the latter act is by and through the gospel, 2 The. 2:14; John 6:44-45). (5) 1 Corinthians 9:23 contains the statement that fellowship with Christians **is** fellowship in the gospel and vice-versa! Spiritual union only occurs in the **same** faith (compare Phi. 1:7 and 1 John 1:3-7).

Perhaps the idea of mutual participation in Christ and therefore fellowship with another Christian is no more clearly seen than in John's statements: "And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us" (1 John 3:24) and "Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit" (1 John 4:13). Those early Christians to whom John wrote knew they were in fellowship "by the Spirit;" a special, miraculous anointing that evidenced their fellowship (1 John 2:20). The fellow-

ship question today concerning the subject of the Holy Spirit is, then, a vital issue. Do Christians know miraculously that they are in fellowship, or do Christians know non-miraculously that joint-participation exists?

Non-miraculous knowledge is in written form today and only in written form except for the limited information one can receive about God from nature (1 Cor. 13:8-10). Miraculous knowledge was given to Christ “without measure” (John 3:34). (Some brethren think that John 3:34 is an “indwelling” passage. It is, rather, a passage about **inspiration**.) The miraculous or divine knowledge Christ had **without measure** was passed on to His disciples (John 17:8, 14). That same knowledge was then written **without measure** under guidance of the Holy Spirit (John 14:26; 16:13; 2 Pet. 1:3). Those folks who compare their spiritual lives to what is written in the New Testament can **know** whether they are in fellowship one with the other (Rom. 8:16; 1 John 2:3). There is no extra-biblical anointing today, whether “super-natural,” non-miraculous or not. All fellowship today is the result of obeying **written** commandments.

Persons who cannot find a comparison between their lives and the New Testament doctrine have **no** fellowship with the Father, Christ, nor the Holy Spirit, nor with those who have fellowship with God (1 Cor. 14:37; 2 John 9-11; Amos 3:3). This essay will outline the teaching about the Holy Spirit now prevalent and will ask the question: “Does error about the indwelling Holy Spirit condemn one’s soul?”

ERROR IS DANGEROUS

There are but two destinies for one’s soul (Mat. 7:13-14). Obviously, some go to heaven and some go to hell (Mat. 25:31-46). Error, or false teaching, can place one’s soul in condemnation: “But he answered and said, Every plant, which my heavenly Father hath not planted, shall be rooted up. Let them alone: they be blind leaders of the blind. And if the blind lead the blind, both shall fall into the ditch” (Mat. 15:13-14). The half-brother of Jesus, James, was rightly concerned about what was taught and warned: “My brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation” (Jam. 3:1). Persons who teach error are lost and those who follow error are lost. Jesus thus warned: “Take heed what ye hear” (Mark 4:24).

Paul outlined the problem of doctrinal error and the fellowship issue when he penned his powerful, cyclical epistle called “Ephesians.” Paul noted that miraculous gifts had been given to certain in the church, “For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ” (Eph. 4:12). What could possibly stymie the completing of saints so the church could work and grow? **Error!** “That we *henceforth* be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, *and* cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive” (Eph. 4:14).

The phrase “**whereby** they lie in wait to **deceive**” follows **after** the wiles of **error** in the American Standard Version. The term translated “error” is *planees* and contrasts growth into Christ with deception.⁶ Persons who teach such error (*planees*) are marked by craftiness (*methodeia*), which is a planned deceit; in fact, the term might be translated as “trickery.”⁷ Only truth can cause true growth in Christ. “But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ” (Eph. 4:15). Those who speak the truth in love of the truth (Paul is discussing affection for truth for truth’s sake, not telling preachers what attitude they should have while teaching) will not lead the church into error; indeed, sincere seekers of truth can know when truth is found and whether it is being taught (John 8:31-32). Error stymies church growth and condemns teacher and disciple. But, at what point does error condemn and what kind of error might one hold that does not condemn?

ERROR CONDEMNS: WHEN?

The kind of error that condemns a soul is illustrated below from fifteen passages. (Interested Bible students may well find others. Ephesians 4:12-15 has been noted above.) Consider that error will send one to hell when:

1. The bride of Christ is attacked. Saul of Tarsus persecuted the church of Christ, even “breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord” (Acts 8:1; 9:1). Saul wrecked havoc on the church with a good conscience (Acts 23:1); yet Jesus confronted Saul, “knocked him down,” and rebuked him for persecuting the Lord by injuring the church (Acts 9:1-6). Saul was **lost** even though his conscience was clear (Acts 9:6; 22:16). Persons who attack the church, whether sincere or not, are also lost. There is but one

church and only one place is the house of God (Eph. 1:22-23; 1 Tim. 3:15). No Christian can teach that there is fellowship outside the body (church) of Christ and that Christians remain saved (Gal. 3:28-29). As Saul was **not** serving God as a Jew, so no one serves God today who is not a New Testament Christian. Any teaching that dilutes the doctrine of the exclusivity of Christ and His church condemns the soul (John 14:6; Eph. 5:23).

2. The teaching leads one to be fearful, unbelieving, abominable, a murderer, a whoremonger, a sorcerer, an idolater, or a liar (Rev. 21:8). The term **fearful** (*delia*) is always used in a bad sense since such a characteristic can **not** come from God (1 Tim. 1:7).⁸ Those who would teach that heaven is an impossible goal unless one is perfect (gnostics) condemn souls through unnecessary fear (Mat. 25:24-26). Also, those who would teach that one cannot know truth place hearers in the untenable position of not being assured of salvation (cf., 1 John 5:13). Perfection (sinlessness) is not required of the saved; penitence is (1 John 1:9). Relativism (truth is situational) is also condemnatory. One may not know everything, but one **can** know what one is taught (John 8:31-32).

All other immoral and unethical doctrine also has no place in heaven. (Roman Catholicism, for example, holds to a doctrine called “mental reservation.” One could lie, per the aforementioned doctrine, as long as the lie fostered Catholicism!) Any one or any group whose teaching leads to an unethical, immoral action condemns souls.

3. The doctrine transgresses (goes beyond) anything Jesus taught. “Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son” (2 John 9). Some try to quibble about this verse by insisting that the meaning is limited to teaching **about** Christ’s deity. John wrote that truth was at stake (2 John 1-3) and that the commandments (plural) of Jesus were truth (2 John 6). Therefore, if one has no New Testament teaching from Jesus about a matter, that matter has no place in one’s faith, and that one has no fellowship with God nor Christ. For example, there is no passage in the New Testament that authorizes (nor even contains the term) instrumental music in worship. Those who use instruments in worship have gone beyond the doctrine of Christ and are condemned. There is **no** fellowship with those who use instruments in worship. (Compare one-man pastor

systems, holy water, infant baptism, rosaries, venerating Mary, clergy-laity distinctions, and a host of other abominations not even hinted at in Holy Writ.) There can be no scriptural fellowship with those who go beyond God's Word.

4. The result of the teaching is division. "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Rom. 16:17). False teaching causes division and one might ask here about the schism being caused by errors concerning the Holy Spirit. Surely when a teaching causes a break in fellowship, good brethren would want immediately to examine such conclusions and the motives behind teaching such doctrines.

5. The occult and false views concerning flesh and spirit arise.

Now the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils...Forbidding to marry, *and commanding* to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth (1 Tim. 4:1, 3).

Very early in the New Testament church, false views began to surface about flesh as being inherently evil.⁹ The result of such an erroneous view is error concerning the Holy Spirit's activity in "awakening" or "enabling" the flesh so it is able to receive salvation. One has written:

If when a person says that one is convicted, converted, and sanctified only by the Spirit's word, he means to refer to the information supplied by the Spirit, he is correct. But if he means to imply that God did not employ providential means (or even miraculous means during the days of miracles) to convict, convert, and sanctify, he is clearly wrong.¹⁰

The source of such thinking (as just quoted above) about the need for something more than the seed of God's Word to convict, convert, and sanctify is a Calvinistic view about the terms **flesh** and **spirit** as used in the Bible, especially in Romans and Galatians. In other words, when one decides that Calvin's idea, and in reality the Gnostic idea, of the evilness of flesh is correct; then one is probably going to adopt the view that God **must** act directly on one in conviction, conversion, and sanctification. To imply that God **must** act providentially in these latter areas denigrates the power of God's Word.

6. The doctrine denies the Deity of Christ.

Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: And every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that *spirit* of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world (1 John 4:2-3).

7. The teaching causes one to fellowship the world. “For Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica” (2 Tim. 4:10; compare James 4:1-3). Love of the world of evil is disloyalty to God.

8. The teaching is **not** truth and truth is not really being sought. “Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on him, If ye continue in my word, *then* are ye my disciples indeed; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free” (John 8:31-32). One not continuing in Jesus’ Word is not Jesus’ disciple. One seeking truth (and time is allowed for such a one to find truth) will find truth.

9. The doctrine is supra-biblical. “He that rejecteth me, and receiveth not my words, hath one that judgeth him: the word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the last day” (John 12:48). The church is often troubled by the doctrine that men in the world are not amenable to the law of God. Such an error is especially designed to circumvent God’s law concerning marriage, divorce, and remarriage. Note that whether one rejects Jesus’ teaching (a person in the world) or accepts Jesus’ teaching (a person in the church); both persons are to be judged by Jesus’ Word. Therefore men stand condemned who teach one law for sinners and another law for saints.

10. The teaching denies apostolic authority. At the infancy of the church a married couple, Ananias and Saphira, attempted to lie to the apostles and the church about a matter of money (Acts 5:1-11). Both the husband and wife died at the feet of the apostle Peter (and no doubt under God’s wrath). Did they die just for lying? If so, there would never be any Christians who could live, including Peter! Ananias and Saphira died because, had they been able to deceive the apostles, such deception would have undermined apostolic authority (Acts 2:42; 5:11-12; Mat. 19:28).

11. The teaching enacts laws God never intended. The Pharisees were ones who often made their traditions law (Mark 7:7-8). Fellowship cannot be extended to those who make laws for God’s people, which laws are not commanded in God’s Word.

12. The teaching stifles growth, both of individual Christians and congregations. “As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby” (1 Pet. 2:2). Because of erroneous teachings about *growing* in Christ, the false doctrine of the direct operation of the Holy Spirit on a saint’s heart has arisen. In a public discussion with Rubel Shelly, this writer pointed out that one **is** a Christian at baptism (2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 2:10).¹¹ Yet, some are trying to be “better” Christians by “growing” in Christ. Such thinking has led to either **perfectionism** or **defeatism**. That is, the legalist teaches sinless perfection, and the liberal teaches that only God’s grace can help one for one cannot help oneself—one is defeated. One who **is** a Christian cannot get any “better” than that. One grows in Christ in order to give glory to God, not in order to be a Christian Christian (whatever that is) (2 Pet. 3:18; Mat. 5:13-17).

To say this another way; is one who is just baptized going to a “lesser” heaven (if he dies) from the heaven a saint enters who has been saved twenty years? Because men have taught error (usually inadvertently) about the need for Christian growth, the reaction in the brotherhood has been to turn to “supernatural, non-miraculous help” from the Holy Spirit¹² or to “grace only” to help one get close to God. One does not grow to sinless perfection, for Christians will always need confession (1 John 1:7-10). One grows to honor God (Mat. 5:13-17). The more Bible one knows; the more one serves; all give glory to the Father. But growth is not in order to have a better seat in heaven. Mansions await there for Christians of all stages of growth (John 14:1-3).

One will never be good enough on one’s own to merit heaven. One needs forgiveness and justification (1 Cor. 6:9-11). One cannot grow into justification for the latter is God’s business (Rom. 4:3).

13. The doctrine causes a brother to perish (1 Cor. 8; Rom. 14). Matters of scruples and opinion must not become matters of fellowship.

14. Those who err from the truth (and are not willing to be re-taught) cause fellowship to be broken (Jam. 5:19-20). Delinquent Christians **must** be recovered in and by personal effort from faithful Christians. It is proper to try to teach those who are in error on any doctrine before withdrawing fellowship (2 The. 3:6ff).

15. The teaching undermines the demands of love (see 1 Corinthians 13).

There are at least sixteen principles thus listed above (including the passage in Ephesians four) that illustrate the point at which error condemns one's soul. What is being said today about the Holy Spirit, and is such doctrine condemnatory? These are the next two questions explored here.

THE HOLY SPIRIT: TWO ISSUES

Although there are numerous issues concerning the activities of the Holy Spirit only two are necessary to this study. Some good brethren hold that the Spirit literally and personally indwells the Christian in an ordinary, non-miraculous way. Other good brethren believe and teach that the Holy Spirit indwells representively through the Word of God. Both sides know that the miraculous age has ended (1 Cor. 13:8-13; Rom. 8:24-25). Neither "side" teaches that the Holy Spirit does anything directly to the saint.¹³ The aforementioned views do **not** violate **any** of the passages listed above as error that condemns. The aforementioned doctrines are not deceptive nor is biblical teaching undermined. This first issue is no basis for breaking of fellowship, even though there is academic disagreement on how the Spirit indwells. A suggestion is given here that brethren who hold either of the two foregoing views would do well to go on to more important matters such as evangelism and stop all the constant bickering because neither view will cause one to lose one's soul.

A second issue has arisen, however, that may be cause for concern. Some brethren seem to be confusing God's providence with the indwelling of the Spirit. One has written: "However, the Holy Spirit has not said that he does not act directly and personally in the area of providence."¹⁴ A second confusion is also added in that the literal, personal indwelling is correlated with prayer:

Do we ever pray for God to "lead us in paths of righteousness"? Do gospel preachers ever pray that prayer?... Am I on scriptural ground when I call on God "to lead me in paths of righteousness"? [sic] Of course I know that I cannot be righteous without walking in harmony with revealed truth. But can I pray for something more than revealed truth?¹⁵

Brethren who are conjoining providence, prayer, and personal indwelling also are insisting that the gift of the Holy Spirit mentioned in Acts 2:38 is the Holy Spirit, Himself, as a gift to every Christian.

Comment: On Pentecost of Acts 2 Peter (by miraculous inspiration) promised to all who would repent and be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ unto the remission of their sins that they would receive “the gift of the Holy Spirit.” The prepositional phrase (“of the Holy Spirit”), modifying “gift” is a Greek Construction called “epexigetical genitive.” This construction basically means “explanatory of,” and thus calls for (and authorizes) the insertion of the words “which is”—that is, the gift which is the Holy Spirit.¹⁶

If the Greek phrase **is** epexigetical genitive, it is only subjectively said so to be. It is highly possible that the phrase in Acts 2:38 is not the genitive of identification, apposition, explanation, or epexigetical that some say it is. The proof that a genitive is epexigetical is that “the word in the genitive is identical with the word it modifies.”¹⁷ Who decides that **gift** and **Holy Spirit** are **identical** terms? Obviously the exegete, from the context (or possibly just from the exegete’s own bias), makes the decision as to the sameness of the terms **gift** and **Holy Spirit**. When one believes that the literal, personal, actual being of the third person of the Godhead enters one’s body after baptism, that one is going to argue that gift and Spirit are identical.

There is another way, however, to view the phrase “gift of the Holy Spirit” in Acts 2:38. It is quite possible that the Greek construction is genitive of possession.¹⁸ This use of the genitive denotes ownership and the test for whether the expression is genitive of possession is to insert the phrase “belonging to” for the preposition “of.”¹⁹ “Belonging to” can be inserted in the phrase and the text would mean “the gift **belonging to** the Holy Spirit.”

What shall be said of these latter things? The phrase in Acts 2:38 **cannot** be dogmatically asserted to be epexigetical genitive. Correlating Acts 8:14-19 and Acts 10:45 with Acts 2:38 seems to indicate that the gift belonging to the Holy Spirit is miraculous (or at least one He gives). (The assertion from those who hold the epexigetical view is that one cannot preach the whole of Acts 2:38, if one holds that the gift is miraculous and limited to New Testament times. Does not one preach all verses in context and explain the meaning? How does one preach the whole of the Decalogue, for example? Such an assertion

that one eliminates some of Acts 2:38 from one's preaching commits the fallacy of composition.)

Since the "gift of the Holy Spirit" is not open to dogmatic assertion about the Greek construction, those who are obstinate about such are arbitrary and subjective. At best one is supposing the case in Acts 2:38. Besides, the phrase **supernatural non-miraculous** is contradictory. If a thing is beyond nature, that thing **is** miraculous.

What shall be said of these assertions that the Holy Spirit must indwell literally and personally that providence works and prayers are answered? One might ask how God answered Hannah's prayer or how providence worked in Esther's life (1 Sam. 1; Est.)! According to the literalists, the Holy Spirit actually enters the human body when one is baptized in order for remission of sins. Was Hannah so baptized or could God not answer prayer during Old Testament times? Was Esther so baptized, or could God not work providentially in Old Testament times? Some quibble that such acts were miraculous "back then." Oh? Elijah was as we are and his prayers were answered (Jam. 5:16-18). God answered Elijah's prayers through the means of controlling nature—not through a supernatural, non-miraculous movement of the Holy Spirit. Such a view of the literal indwelling is at best subjective and at the worst it is becoming divisive. If the doctrine continues to be pushed, it will cause a break in fellowship which will be a terribly sad day indeed.

CONCLUSION

Until one is right with God, one has no fellowship with Deity or another Christian (1 John 1:7; Eph. 5:11; 2 The. 3:6; et al.). There are matters of faith and fellowship and there is error which condemns the soul. If teaching about the Holy Spirit goes beyond God's Word, then there will be no fellowship. Perhaps those who are pushing the latter issue will consider what discord sowing is and reconsider their dogmatism on Acts 2:38.

ENDNOTES

¹Friedrich Hauch, "koinos," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, Gerhard Kittel, ed. (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 3:789-809.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 797.

⁴Ibid.

⁵Ibid., p. 798.

⁶Herbert Braun, "planao," *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, ed., Gerhard Kittel (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978), 6:228-253.

⁷Joseph Henry Thayer, "methodeia," *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1962), pp. 395-96.

⁸Thayer, "delia," p. 127.

⁹See Kurt Randolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism* (New York, NY: Harper Collins Publishers, 1987).

¹⁰Mac Deaver, "Scared to Death," *Biblical Notes* (Sept./Oct., 1996), p. 10.

¹¹Keith A. Mosher, Sr., "Grace and Works in Romans 4-5 and James 2:14-26," *Grace Faith, Works: How do They Relate*, ed. Philip Slate (Huntsville, AL: Publishing Designs, Inc., 1991), p. 105.

¹²The terms "supernatural and non-miraculous" are contradictory. Putting them together results in an oxymoron.

¹³See Gus Nichols, *Lectures on the Holy Spirit* (Montgomery, AL: Southern Christian University, 1994) and Guy N. Woods, *Questions and Answers: Open Forum* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1976), pp. 54ff.

¹⁴Mac Deaver, p. 9.

¹⁵Ibid.

¹⁶Roy Deaver, "Notes/Views/Concepts on the Indwelling of the Holy Spirit," *Biblical Notes* (Sept.-Oct., 1996), p. 3.

¹⁷James A. Brooks and Carlton Winbery, *Syntax of New Testament Greek* (Lanham, MD: University Press, 1988), p. 16. All Greek lexicographers and grammarians checked agreed with this definition of the epexegetical construction.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 8.

¹⁹Ibid.

I JUST WANT TO BE A CHRISTIAN

BY RUBEL SHELLEY

Gary W. Summers



Gary W. Summers and his wife Barbara have two children and one grandson. He is a graduate of Illinois State University (B.A., M.A.). He taught college for four years and was a teacher/principal of Central Illinois Christian Academy in Peoria, Illinois.

Gary has done local work in Pennsylvania, Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, and Texas and is currently with the Pearl Street Church of Christ in Denton, Texas. He is author of many newspaper editorials and letters to editors. He writes for several brotherhood journals, and speaks on several lectureships each year.

INTRODUCTION

When a man wants to seduce a woman, he is not usually so obvious as to ask her outright for her sexual favors. He makes a great show of affection and concern for her. He protests his great love for her and assures her of his honorable and noble motives. In a short period of time, if he is skillful, he may thus achieve his goal if he is subtle rather than direct. What she would have refused to do in a single step she may consent to incrementally.

When a false teacher wants to seduce the church, he does not stand up and shout, "Hang doctrine! Let us fellowship all who call themselves Christians." He makes a great show of affection for the bride of Christ. He says that his conscience will just not allow him to be sectarian anymore, and he appeals to noble principles. But in a few years' time, like any seducer, he has obtained (incrementally) what he was always after—the apostasy (seduction) of the church.

Those who may know the character of the fleshly seducer will warn the young woman, but she thinks some jealous girls made up stories to embarrass him. Nobody knows this man the way she does. She really understands him. He is tender and kind and would never do anything to hurt her. Those who are warned about the spiritual se-

ducer are similarly rebuffed. “It’s just a matter of some ‘small’ preachers being jealous of his ‘great’ abilities. He cares about the lost, and he would never do anything to hurt the church.”

The ravished woman has no recourse. She has no one to blame for her predicament; she refused to heed the warnings. Her virtue is gone, and so is Mr. Wonderful. There is nothing to be done but to live with the consequences of her actions. Seduced brethren are not quite as smart as this unfortunate woman: most of them have yet to figure out that they have been robbed of anything significant. In fact, in some instances they were only too happy to cooperate with the bandit.

The goal of this chapter is to analyze Rubel Shelly’s 1984 views of fellowship as expressed in his book, *I Just Want To Be a Christian*. The principles taught therein shall be analyzed and then compared to the transcription of a speech he made twelve years later. Some may think that it is unfair and judgmental to equate this formerly sound brother to a seducer and to affirm that his current unscriptural positions were in view all along, but seldom does a person travel anywhere without a map to guide him.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE RESTORATION APPEAL

Much of Shelly’s 1984 book consists of quoting restoration leaders of the past. All would agree that much of what these courageous men wrote was biblically sound. It is also true, however, that they were finding their way out of denominations and denominational doctrine. We have the benefit of an additional 75 to 175 years over them. Certainly, we do not mean to imply that we are so much smarter than they were; it is not a matter of intelligence but of light. Alexander Campbell and others held some views that few, if any, would affirm today. On certain subjects Campbell’s understanding evolved. With respect to the purpose for baptism, it also devolved.

The point is that these great men of the past cannot serve as our authority any more than the writings of current brethren could serve as the basis of doctrine 50 or 100 years from now. The question must always be: “What do the Scriptures teach?” Shelly cites many restorationists to demonstrate that his 1984 teachings are nothing new—but only what faithful brethren have always said. The fallacy is that he expects the reader to assume that the quotations he uses from these men are the views about which they were doctrinally correct, but the possibility also exists that he is citing from them teachings

about which they were still in error. Shelly's ideas, just as everyone else's, must be evaluated, not in the light of the restoration leaders, but in the light of the Word of God.

THE SEDUCTION OF THE FALSE CONCLUSION

In Greek mythology the Sirens enticed sailors with their sweet songs. The seamen became so entranced that they failed to do anything else—even eat; they died of starvation. Shelly is a master singer when he sets forth an argument, but the reader will starve on his conclusions. Consider the following paragraph, with which all would agree.

The marvelous spirit of unity and oneness we need in local bodies results from a common love for Jesus Christ. There may be deeply held convictions among people in those churches which are not identical on every point, but love for Christ generates tolerance. The essence of tolerance is not that people do not have convictions but that they have convictions that are held within the context of a tremendous love for Jesus. That love is so great that it will not allow those particular opinions or ideas to be made tests of fellowship.¹

How many congregations could have profited over the years from such a scriptural concept? Love for Christ and one another must take precedence over the opinions of men. How wonderful, if instead of biting and devouring one another, brethren would say, "I recognize that the strong conviction that I hold is nevertheless an opinion, and I yield it for the sake of unity"? How much stronger the Lord's church would be! But now that we have heard the sweet song, Shelly would starve us with his conclusion; these words follow immediately those cited above: "Nothing that does not have to do with the saving of a person's soul should be allowed to pass as a test of fellowship between brothers in Christ."²

At one level the reader may still agree—since the statement is just ambiguous enough to include both truth and error. It is correct if one understands that true worship and right doctrine are crucial to salvation, and therefore to fellowship—but false if one casts worship and doctrine behind his back. Shelly eventually sets forth a position (which will be examined in the next section), but he continues to intersperse snippets of truth along the way to lend credibility to his thesis.

One of those is this sentence: "Perhaps we have been guilty of too much all-or-nothing thinking on the topic of fellowship."³ How often

have brethren been willing to “write off” one another. At the Freed-Hardeman Forum on John 3:16 and the phrase **only begotten**, while Noel Merideth and Robert R. Taylor (who argued for its retention) were making clear that this disagreement was not a fellowship issue, some in the audience were saying, “Why not?” This writer also agrees with Meredith and Taylor but was distressed that some were willing to make fellowship an all-or-nothing proposition based on the way *monogenes* was translated in some versions. Surely Shelly is correct when he emphasizes love and unity over opinions or matters that are not crucial to salvation.

THE 7% SEDUCTION

When Sherlock Holmes became bored due to a lack of any perplexing mysteries to solve, he would resort to his cocaine habit and use a 7% solution. We have no way of knowing how bored Dr. Shelly is, or if he gets high on error, but presenting only 93% of the truth is deceptive. In addition to making scriptural observations periodically, he sets forth his ideas of the basis for unity, and he is right—as far as he goes. But he eliminates some criteria that the Scriptures include. Here is his position in his own words.

My suggestion is that only such items as pertain directly to the seven ones of Ephesians 4:4-6 are of such a nature as to qualify as issues of faith (i.e., doctrinal tests of fellowship). If one denies one or more of these necessary items of Christian doctrine, he becomes subject to rebuke immediately and, if he cannot be brought to repentance, disfellowship. The only item I would add to the list of seven things in Ephesians 4 is one which is surely assumed by appealing to this or other biblical text for authority in religion: the all-sufficiency of the Word of God.⁴

Shelly then provides his analysis of three of these concepts. Passing over one Spirit, one body, and one hope, he gives a brief statement about the “one Lord” (with which all would agree). Then he very hurriedly covers the next “one” with one sentence, albeit a long one.

One who denies any element of the one faith (i.e., the gospel message of redemption through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ) has turned back from the truth and are [sic] walking in the footsteps of those whom John rebukes in his three epistles.⁵

He assumes that the one faith applies only to salvation; who said so? Why would not the one faith refer to the entire body of New Testament doctrine, as it does in other passages of Scripture? Paul

encouraged brethren to “stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together *for* the faith of the gospel” (Phi. 1:27). Jude exhorted brethren to “earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints” (Jude 3). The one who fails to provide for his family has denied “the faith” (1 Tim. 5:8). Later in Ephesians 4, after the seven ones, Paul describes coming to “unity of the faith” (v. 13).

Do all of these passages refer merely to “the gospel message of redemption through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ”? To ask the question is to answer it. Although “the faith” includes God’s plan of salvation (Acts 13:8-12), it also includes the totality of New Testament doctrine (Jude 3). To all those who desire to downplay and denigrate doctrine, the question should be asked, “Why do you think God filled the New Testament with it?”

Shelly does not comment much on baptism in this section of the book, but he does raise a question which prefigures his later attempts to broaden the borders of fellowship: “How many truths about baptism must one understand before he is a proper candidate to receive it?”⁶ Of course, such is a “loaded” question; the implication is that no one needs to know all there is to know about baptism; therefore, he need not know much at all. Without doing so overtly, Shelly adds another item to the list of things over which we may withdraw fellowship: kindness. Yes, even if one is trying to teach the truth, if he does it divisively rather than in kindness, “he is subject to rebuke and disfellowship.”⁷ He cites Titus 3:10-11 (from the NIV) and then pretends this verse was written to those who style themselves “defenders of the faith.” It is obvious to anyone who has read the preceding verse and has even a cursory knowledge of the overall context of the book that the application is to those who were contentious about non-salvation matters, not those dedicated to teaching truth.

Concerning Titus 3:10, *The Pulpit Commentary* states: “The *heretic* is one who forsakes the truth held by the Church, and *chooses* some doctrine of his own devising (*hairesis*).”⁸ He might also elevate an opinion to the status of doctrine, magnify some minor point of doctrine (something not well substantiated) into a bone of contention, or try to form a party, but no major commentator would try to ascribe the word *heretic* to a man upholding the truth. Shelly (to suggest such a horrendous misapplication) must be anticipating the need to defend himself against those he knows will oppose him.

So while brother Shelly would withdraw from those advancing truth, if they were divisive about it (how can truth not be divided from error?), he could live with the false doctrine of premillennialism. Several pages worth of high-sounding sentiments come suddenly to a halt (for some of us) with Shelly's first example of what should **not** be an issue of fellowship. Up to this point we may or may not agree with what Shelly has written, but much he has said sounded good. The reader has wondered periodically, "How does Shelly apply some of these principles?" Now he gives us an opportunity to see what he has been getting at.

Suppose someone's eschatology entails the view that Christ will reign on earth for 1,000 years at his return. I think he is wrong in his opinion-doctrine. But so long as he does not deny the place of the church as Christ's spiritual body and teaches that all will be held accountable at the second coming and the Judgment, is it necessary for him to be severed from the fellowship of the body? The answer lies in the attitude with which he bears his belief. If it becomes a divisive hobby with him, he should be marked and disfellowshipped—but, again, not for his belief but for his divisive manner with his belief.⁹

Our first objection is the linking of the words **opinion** and **doctrine**. Jesus distinguishes between the two. He taught that when men substituted the ideas or traditions of men (opinions) for the teachings (doctrine) of God, it made their worship vain. "But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men" (Mat. 15:9). What is the purpose in making these two separate concepts one—if not to demote doctrine to the status of mere opinion?

Shelly creates a false dichotomy. Either the hypothetical fellow keeps his doctrine to himself, or he becomes divisive concerning it. There is a third option. He may wish to set forth his case in Bible classes when the subject comes up, as it will in Matthew 24, Mark 13, Luke 17 and 21, John 6:15, and John 18:36. And then what of the other books in the New Testament? What about 1 Thessalonians 4, 2 Thessalonians 2, and other assorted verses? Dare anyone teach the book of Revelation in this person's presence? And what about Old Testament prophecies? The doctrine of premillennialism affects one's view and interpretation of a vast number of Scriptures. Anyone who remains silent as passage after passage is discussed must not believe very strongly in the doctrine in the first place. At any rate, past divi-

sions over premillennialism did not occur because its adherents were silent.

THE SEVEN ONES (PLUS TWO OR THREE)

What about Shelly's claims that fellowship can only be withdrawn on the basis of the seven ones of Ephesians 4, plus denying the all-sufficiency of the Word, plus being a divisive person (even with the truth)? Actually, Shelly adds another category to the list—moral offenses.

One forfeits the fellowship of the church by teaching or receiving a false doctrine which denies one of the essential elements of Christian doctrine or by living in an ungodly manner and refusing to repent of his sin.¹⁰

While all would agree that we should withdraw from brethren who refuse to repent of immoral actions (as per 1 Corinthians 5), this moral principle is nowhere to be found among the seven ones of Ephesians 4. Now Shelly has increased the seven bases of fellowship/withdrawal of fellowship to ten. How long will it be before he thinks of yet another?

Most brethren will agree with the ten points he has enumerated, but one thing many would include he has omitted: doctrine. Not only has fellowship on the basis of doctrine been left out of the list (doctrine beyond the seven ones); Shelly has fought at every opportunity against the idea that doctrine is a basis of fellowship.

1. First, he anticipates the use of 2 John 9-11 and tries to neutralize the passage by applying it only to false teachers who deny the deity of Jesus.¹¹

2. Next, the reader will recall, he links doctrine and opinion, which the Scriptures do not do.¹²

3. Then he states unequivocally of 1 Corinthians 1:10 that "it is a nonsensical interpretation of the verse to understand it to mean that one must be in perfect agreement on every detail of Christian faith and practice before he can share in the fellowship of the body."¹³ He fails, however, to provide a sensible interpretation of this verse for us.

IS DOCTRINE CRUCIAL?

The passage in 2 John 9-11 cannot be limited to those denying the deity of Christ any more than preaching "another" gospel must be

restricted to Judaizing teachers. Broadly-stated principles transcend their immediate context and have other applications. Do we really want to argue that there is only one false gospel, instead of several? Do we really think denying the Deity of Christ is the only way to transgress and fail to abide in the doctrine of Christ?¹⁴

Jesus warned of false prophets who sport sheep's clothing (Mat. 7:15). Paul told the elders at Ephesus that men would arise from their own number who would speak perverse things in order to draw away disciples after themselves (Acts 20:30). To the Romans he wrote with emphasis: "Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (16:17).

Paul himself did precisely what he instructed these brethren to do. In some of his letters Paul calls false teachers by name:

And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; Who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some (2 Tim. 2:17-18).

Now, brother Shelly, which of the ten things you enumerated, does this teaching violate? Does it deny the one Spirit, the one body, the one hope, the one Lord, the one faith, the one baptism, the one God? Does it deny the all-sufficiency of the Word? Is it divisive? Is it immoral? Primarily, it denies the truth—the New Testament doctrine concerning the resurrection. By implication it might deny the hope that Christians have, but that would only be the case if the teaching altogether denied the Christian's reward. So do we mark these men? Paul did, and we certainly hope for his sake that he was not divisive (by Shelly's standard) in opposing these men with the truth!

Paul further speaks of false apostles (2 Cor. 11:13-15) and of imposters that sent brethren letters as if from him (2 The. 2:2). Peter writes at length about false teachers (2 Pet. 2), and Jude was diverted from whatever spiritual points he first intended to make to the brethren; rather, it became needful for him to exhort them to earnestly contend for the faith (Jude 3). Yet despite all of these Scriptures, which brother Shelly knows well (he once correctly used them), he cannot now include false doctrine as a fellowship issue. This exclusion invariably constitutes a warning that false doctrine will follow; otherwise why exclude such a crucial fellowship issue?

IS BAPTISM CRUCIAL?

There are two ways to make fellowship more inclusive. One way is to eliminate the importance of sound doctrine; the other is to tamper with the entrance requirements into the kingdom. Shelly's assault on doctrine has been noted above; next he attacks baptism **for the remission of sins**. Earlier in this book Shelly made some strong, firm statements about Christians and fellowship.

First...let it be stressed again that there can be no spiritual fellowship between those in Christ and those outside his body. The reason is obvious: There is no brotherhood between the two classes of men. Those outside of Christ are still in their sins and are not God's children by virtue of spiritual rebirth.¹⁵

One becomes a Christian only through his or her faith in Christ, repentance from all known sin, and baptism in Jesus' name. There is no other way to become a part of the fellowship of the saints. For those in the body of Christ to extend spiritual brotherhood to anyone who has not yet become a child of God is for them to fail to acknowledge the divine principle of inclusion.¹⁶

The reason is simple enough: denominational doctrines of baptism with which I am familiar reject one or more biblical truths about the subject. Baptist doctrine, for example, explicitly affirms that baptism is not essential to salvation and is instead an ordinance by means of which already saved persons join the Baptist denomination.¹⁷

At first glance the statements cited above seem pretty accurate, but the discerning eye will notice that **for the remission of sins** is not attached to "baptism in Jesus' name." Such is no accident. After seemingly struggling to the top of the mountain to establish the biblical position, Shelly immediately begins coasting back down. Actually, he never made it all the way to the summit, unless Joplin is counted. At that "unity summit" Shelly's group also left **for the remission of sins** off his definition of who is a Christian.

Some may have been surprised by that omission, but Shelly insists that the phrase is non-essential. He argues that to require the penitent soul to be baptized **for the remission of sins** makes "a scriptural reason for baptism into **the** scriptural reason for it." Worse yet, he charges that such insistence turns baptism "into a partisan fetish."¹⁸ Imagine, being accused of such things for teaching what Peter did!

Shelly proposes that a person will be saved if he knows that he is a lost sinner, that Christ is the only Savior, and that he must obey Him in sincere faith.¹⁹ The question the reader might ask is, "Exactly what

Scripture teaches this doctrine?” Beginning with John, the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins was taught (Mark 1:4). The first time the gospel is preached on the day of Pentecost this divine purpose for baptism is also given (Acts 2:38). The people to whom John, Jesus, and the apostles preached all knew the purpose for baptism. There is not one Scripture, however, in which someone is taught, “Be baptized to obey Jesus.”²⁰

Now why does Shelly desire to make the purpose of baptism irrelevant, if not to broaden the borders of the kingdom? And why, if someone later learned the appropriate purpose for baptism, would it be a problem for him or her to become immersed scripturally, as so many have? The only discernible advantage is that with this system Shelly can call them “brethren,” fellowship them, and speak in their assemblies.

Shelly also takes issue with knowing the purpose for baptism because it “places the responsibility for making baptism effective upon the person being baptized instead of God, thus making baptism an act of works-righteousness.”²¹ Hogwash! Baptism is the answer of a good conscience toward God (1 Pet. 3:21), and the responsibility for making baptism effective **does** rest upon the person being baptized. Perhaps Shelly has forgotten that God is a rewarder of those who “diligently seek Him” (Heb. 11:6). Jesus has died on the cross, and God has preserved His Word for us. There must be a spark of desire on our part to seek salvation. There must be a love of truth (2 The. 2:10). All need to obey “from the heart that form of doctrine” (Rom. 6:17). Shelly would have us believe that it is soooooo difficult to understand the purpose for baptism. If it were, many members of the body would not be brethren!

Shelly astounds us all by advocating: “We obey commands rather than purposes.”²² Is it this author’s imagination, or does that statement sound legalistic? Imagine this conversation: “Why are you being baptized?” “There’s a command.” “But why is it commanded?” “I don’t know and don’t care.” “But there must be a reason for doing it.” “I’m just being obedient. If I obey God, He will be happy.” “So you have no idea why you should be baptized?” “No. I don’t need a reason.” “Okay, Okay. What’s the sword for?” “I have to cut off my right hand.”

Not only is Shelly's position legalistic; it is foolish, to say the least. It defies the rules of Bible study that we all use—just to create a special case by which to increase membership in the Lord's church. His reasoning must be rejected; let us abide by the truth.

THE DECEPTION COMES TO FRUITION

Twelve years elapsed from the time that *I Just Want To Be a Christian* was written and the occasion upon which Shelly gave a speech to the Spiritual Renewal Conference in Florence, Alabama, on April 19, 1996. During those years he appeared at the Joplin Unity Summit and some of its successors, workshops, forums, and several denominational gatherings. He also has become editor of a publication called *Wineskins* (more will be stated about that later).

The last hundred pages of his book contained several articles and documents from some of the Restoration thinkers. Although not everything they said was accurate, much of their writing contained noble ideas. Has Shelly remained with those men and their ideas since 1984? Does he still agree with his own ideas that he set forth in that book? Let us see.

Shelly's topic at Florence was "God Calls for the Unity of His Body." In his book Shelly railed against sectarianism. The last hundred pages contains many articles opposed to sectarianism—among us or anyone else. Consider one sample of Shelly's writing.

If we want our religious neighbors to consider the plea for the restoration of New Testament Christianity and to come out of denominationalism into a non-sectarian fellowship, we are going to have to demonstrate that we are such a body of believers ourselves.²³

The above quotation makes it clear that non-sectarian Christianity is to be desired. First, we must be certain that we are genuinely non-sectarian, and then we can appropriately encourage others to leave their denominations. However, the new and improved (he must think) Rubel Shelly is no longer taking that approach. He thinks these people will only be satisfied by staying in their denominations. The following is from his Florence speech.

We will not lose our separate denominational identities, we will not give up our particular heritages and histories, we will not have to give up our distinctive practices with regard to our different organizational structures, worship, and so on. I see no need for that (page 4 of the manuscript).

I don't believe God ever called us to institutional unity, because for institutional unity to happen, we'd have to disregard the fact that our personalities, our wirings, our backgrounds are so diverse, and pretend they're all the same (page 7).

Churches, it's time for us to bury those dead fracases of the past, and to weep and in repentance to resolve that we will never again be party to the kind of sorry spectacle that we've shown the world when we would fragment and divide the body of Christ and make a mockery of Jesus' prayer that we be one (page 12).

Shelly has reinvented himself again. All the liberals who are still applauding the 1984 Shelly are "out of sync." According to the 1996 model, we need denominations because we are all different. Notice that in the second paragraph above Shelly addressed "churches." He is no longer advocating that people leave their denominations; instead, all should be united—by ignoring doctrine. How shameful that we have had the "desire to lock horns at the drop of a doctrine" (page 1).

Brethren, why have we not realized these "new truths" before? Why, Jesus or Paul would never have locked horns over a doctrine, would they (please excuse the sarcasm)? Surely it was not Jesus who said, "beware of the leaven of bread...of the Pharisees and of the Sadducees" (Mat. 16:11-12), was it? Our Lord would not have accused a scribe or Pharisee of making his convert "twofold more the child of hell" as himself (Mat. 23:15), would he? Paul absolutely could not have told Timothy, "Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine; continue in them: for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (1 Tim. 4:16), knowing how divisive doctrine can be, could he?

Shelly has discovered nothing new. His current doctrine is anything but original; many have observed the ways it parallels Ketcherside, Garret, Scott, Hook, and others. What it does not parallel is the New Testament. Unity is important; it may be that members of the body of Christ have not valued it as much as we should. But truth is also important; without a love of it, no one can be saved (2 The. 2:10). Truth involves doctrine. No one can get rid of one without destroying the other. Shelly and those who agree with him would not say they care nothing for truth, but when they denigrate doctrine, such is the result.

What about Shelly's statements about baptism? Remember his emphatic "there can be no spiritual fellowship between those in Christ

and those outside his body”? Remember “For those in the body of Christ to extend spiritual brotherhood to anyone who has not yet become a child of God is for them to fail to acknowledge the divine principle of inclusion”? Remember his insistence that one can only become a Christian through “baptism in Jesus’ name”?

Shelly has now fellowshiped the Episcopalians, Presbyterians, the Disciples of Christ, Pentecostals, and the Methodists, none of which is known for stressing baptism by immersion. Either Shelly is now accepting sprinkling for baptism, or baptism has become to him just another irrelevancy. Once he started downhill to accept the Baptists as brethren, he just could not bring himself to stop until he included all as brethren.

Just as Shelly has capitulated regarding doctrine, the nature of the church, and God’s plan of salvation, one cannot help wondering if he has also given up on the Lordship of Jesus Christ. The magazine, *Wineskins*, of which he is editor, published an article written by Andre Resner entitled “Christmas at Matthew’s House.” The following excerpts are taken from that article. Resner thinks the “immaculate conception” refers to Jesus rather than to Mary, as the Catholics (who invented the doctrine) teach. The second quote below attempts to portray Ruth as sexually promiscuous. The final quotes refer to Mary.

For Matthew it begins in sexual scandal and it ends in political power plays. Before he can tell the scandal of Mary’s “immaculate conception,” he has to subtly remind us of other scandalous women.²⁴

And Ruth...“dear, sweet Ruth.” Well, just what was she doing out there at the threshing floor at Boaz’ feet? And why did he want her to stay there all night, yet leave before daylight, and not let anybody see her? Hmm.²⁵

It’s a sort of “Here we go again, folks...” Another sexually questionable woman. And what about Joseph’s faith in the face of Mary’s story? For it was he, who after a single dream, went ahead and married her. A dream that was real, yes, but still a dream. Could it have been a message from God? Or, could it have been his own imagination, his wanting to believe her so much that his subconscious produced a nocturnal justification for marrying her, even in the face of such an outlandish excuse.²⁶

How dare someone impugn either Ruth, whom everyone knew was a virtuous woman (Ruth 3:11), or Mary, who was a virgin at the time of Jesus’ birth? Resner’s treatment of these two women is nothing

short of blasphemy, and if we were living under the Old Testament system, this author would be happy to throw the first stone!

But what of Rubel Shelly, who published the article, and (so far as is known) has never repudiated it? In *I Just Want To Be a Christian* he said there must be unity on the seven ones of Ephesians 4, one of which is “one Lord.” Does Shelly not think that castigating the virgin birth of Jesus and insinuating that His father was someone other than the Holy Spirit would remove Him from being the Son of God? Stripped of His deity, how could Jesus possibly have been all of the things He claimed to be? The very foundation of the church is His Sonship (Mat. 16:13-18)!

How sad for one to evolve to such a high degree of spirituality (and education) that he no longer stands for any biblical or scriptural doctrine—not even the virgin birth and deity of Jesus. But, hey, just think of all the folks we can have unity with.

THE DECEPTION CONTINUES

Having given up all doctrine, Shelly would appear to have nowhere else to go, but he has already begun loosening his grip on morality. In his Florence speech he ridicules those who would dispute whether or not one should keep Bud Light in the refrigerator (page 10-11). He boasts about having “been to church fellowships where big pitchers of beer and bottles of wine are all down the table” (page 11).

From drinking it is a small step (probably a staggering one) to the gaming tables. After all, what harm can there be in a little gambling? Does the Bible specifically forbid it? Next fornication might become permissible, then adultery (but only in certain circumstances, of course), and homosexuality. With doctrine dead and buried, morality is the only realm left to target, and think of how many we can get into the kingdom with Bingo games, beer parties, and the sexual freedom that so many people crave. As some of those who built the gymnasiums grow older, look for those facilities to be made into taverns with game rooms.

Are these descriptions merely the work of an overwrought imagination? 2 Peter 2 indicates that some have traveled this road before. They have, by promising liberty, made those who had escaped from moral pollutions slaves of corruption all over again. Could it happen again? Yes, and the perfect leader is someone who can change his

doctrine with every new decade. Who knows what will happen in a new century?

ENDNOTES

¹Rubel Shelly, *I Just Want To Be A Christian* (Nashville, TN: 20th Century Christian, 1984), p. 83.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

⁴Ibid., p. 91.

⁵Ibid.

⁶Ibid., p. 92.

⁷Ibid., pp. 93-94.

⁸A. C. Hervey, "Titus," *The Pulpit Commentary*, ed. H. D. M. Spence and Joseph S. Exell (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1962), 21:4:46.

⁹Shelly, p. 94.

¹⁰Ibid., p. 96.

¹¹Ibid., p. 90.

¹²Ibid., p. 94.

¹³Ibid., p. 97.

¹⁴For a full discussion of interpretations of this verse, see the author's chapter entitled "Is Open Division in the Church Over Liberalism Inevitable?" *Studies in Matthew*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1995), pp. 647-673.

¹⁵Shelly, p. 88.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 89.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 102.

¹⁸Ibid.

¹⁹Ibid., pp. 104-105.

²⁰For a fuller treatment of this subject, see the author's chapter, "What Must One Know About Baptism For It To Be Valid?" *Studies in Romans*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1996), pp. 595-623.

²¹Shelly, p. 104.

²²Ibid., p. 106.

²³Ibid., p. 80.

²⁴Andre Resner, "Christmas At Matthew's House," *Wineskins* (Nov. 1992), p. 5.

²⁵Ibid., p. 6.

²⁶Ibid.

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IN THE GRIP OF GRACE, BY MAX LUCADO

David W. Hester



David W. Hester is a third-generation gospel preacher. He received his B.A. in Bible from Freed-Hardeman University in 1987 and his M.A. from Southern Christian University in 1990. David has been preaching the gospel for eighteen years, having served several congregations in Alabama. He is currently working with the Spring Valley Church of Christ near Tusculumbia, Alabama. He is the author of the book *Among The Scholars*, and has written for the *Gospel Advocate*, *Firm Foundation*, *Words of Truth*, and *The World Evangelist*.

David is married to the former Brenda Tarpley of Decatur, and they have two sons.

It is nearly impossible to walk into a bookstore, whether religious or secular, and not see a book written by Max Lucado. At present, he is one of the top selling religious authors in the country. His books are to be found in a great number of church libraries (often donated by bereaved families) and are read by many brethren. However, they seem to not realize they are endangering themselves.

Max Lucado, who preaches for the Oak Hills Church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas, is a talented wordsmith (both in print and orally). But the pictures he paints concerning fellowship are not in keeping with the Word of God.

Much has been said (rightly) concerning Lucado's statements on his radio program *Upwards*, in which he declared one can be saved without baptism. However, he had made such statements before—in print. In 1996, brother Lucado released *In The Grip Of Grace*. The book purports to be an overview of grace as presented by Paul in the Roman epistle. Of course, in the typical Lucado style, the biblical text takes a back seat to the stories, platitudes, and syrupy prose that has become a trademark of his work.

Given the fact that Lucado has spoken frequently at denominational churches, including the recent Promise Keepers rally in Washington D. C., one would wonder how he could attempt to justify himself. *In The Grip Of Grace* gives us that attempt.

Lucado lays the groundwork for his expanded view of fellowship in chapter five, "Godless Religion." Beginning on page 47, he presents his view on baptism. In the section entitled, "Don't Trust a Symbol," he quotes from Romans 2 and 4 and says, "Circumcision was symbolic. Its purpose was to show what God had already done" (p. 48). Lucado then talks of his wedding ring. He says, "The ring is a symbol of our love, a statement of our love, a declaration of our love, but it is not the source of our love." Further, he declares, "It is a symbol, nothing more" (p. 48).

On page 49 he says, "Substitute a contemporary symbol such as baptism or communion or church membership." He later declares, "A symbol has no power apart from the ones who share it" (p. 49). To make his point even more emphatic, Lucado declares:

Please understand. Symbols are important. Some of them, like communion and baptism, illustrate the cross of Christ. They symbolize salvation, demonstrate salvation, even articulate salvation. But they do not impart salvation (p. 50).

Further, "Do we honestly think God would save his children based upon a symbol?" And, "He saves us, not because we trust in a symbol, but because we trust in a Savior" (p. 50). He concludes the section on page 51 by saying, "Just as lineage, laws, and tattoos don't make me a sailor, heritage, rituals, and ceremonies don't make me a Christian." As we will see, this comparison in particular was done with a purpose in mind. However, let us consider what Lucado is saying concerning baptism.

In order for there to be wide fellowship, the line of demarcation must either be blurred or moved. The New Testament clearly draws the line at baptism. In John 3:5 our Lord said, "Except a man be born of water and *of* the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." Further, Acts 22:16 says, "And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord." Romans 6:3-4 plainly teaches we are buried with Christ into His death and raised to walk in newness of life. Yes, baptism symbolizes the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ, but it is more than a symbol. In it one receives the benefits of the blood of Christ, and is married, in a spiritual sense, to Him. Thereby one enters into the body of Christ (Gal. 3:27).

Which brings us to Lucado's wedding ring analogy. It is fatally flawed, for the point at which a couple is married is when they exchange vows and say, "I do." In the antebellum period, slaves had the common practice of "jumping the broom." At that point they became husband and wife. The ring, as every preacher knows, is a token of the love and commitment the couple has for each other. But, the couple is not married unless and until the vows are exchanged.

Likewise, a person is not "married" to Christ unless and until he has been buried with Him in baptism and raised with Him to walk in newness of life. Predicated upon the person's belief in Christ, repentance, and confession of Christ, baptism "doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 3:21). Lucado is "all wet" (no pun intended) concerning baptism. However, he says what he does to prepare the reader for his views on fellowship. For, you see, if the dividing line between the sinner and salvation is moved, one can include a large number of religious people as brothers and sisters. That is what Lucado attempts to do.

In chapter 16, "Life Aboard The Fellow-Ship," he begins by quoting Romans 15:7. He writes, "only God can judge my neighbor...I must accept who God accepts" (p. 159). He then compares the church to a ship. In the section "Rocking the Boat" he writes:

Each can tell of a personal encounter with the captain, for each has received a personal call...Our faith was born at the sight of his fondness, and so we went. We each followed him across the gangplank of his grace onto the same boat (p. 160).

Notice, not a part of their bodies get wet. Interesting, isn't it, given what he had earlier said about baptism, especially the comment he made about the sailor?

But notice who all Lucado includes in the ship:

Some think once you're on the boat, you can't get off. Others say you'd be foolish to go overboard, but the choice is yours. Some believe you volunteer for service; others believe you were destined for the service before the ship was even built. Some predict a storm of great tribulation will strike before we dock; others say it won't hit until we are safely ashore. There are those who speak to the captain in a personal language. There are those who think such languages are extinct.

There are those who think the officers should wear robes, there are those who think there should be no officers at all, and there are those who think we are all officers and should all wear robes.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster.

And then there is the issue of the weekly meeting at which the captain is thanked and his words *read*. All agree on its importance, but few agree on its nature. Some want it loud, others quiet. Some want ritual, others spontaneity. Some want to celebrate so they can meditate; others meditate so they can celebrate. Some want a meeting for those who've gone overboard. Others want to reach those overboard but without going overboard and neglecting those on board.

And, oh, how we tend to cluster (p. 162).

The amount of compromise in this one excerpt is nothing short of breathtaking. In this one passage, Lucado includes Calvinists, premillennialists, charismatics, and many others. The contrast between Lucado and Paul is striking.

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and *that* there be no divisions among you; but *that* ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them *which are of the house* of Chloe, that there are contentions among you. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul? (1 Cor. 1:10-13).

Compare that to Lucado:

How will the world believe that Jesus was sent by God? Not if we agree with each other. Not if we solve every controversy. Not if we are unanimous on each vote. Not if we never make a doctrinal error. But if we love one another (p. 163).

Further: "Unity begins, not in demanding that others change, but in admitting that we aren't so perfect ourselves" (p. 164). Then:

The answer to arguments? Acceptance. The first step to unity? Acceptance. Not agreement, acceptance. Not unanimity, acceptance. Not negotiation, arbitration, or elaboration. Those might come later but only after the first step, acceptance (p. 165).

Which writer will we accept as true? The inspired apostle or the uninspired author? To ask is to answer. Paul clearly called for unity—not union—in matters of faith and practice. Is that unanimity? Sure. But, what of matters of opinion? Paul discusses that at length in Romans 14. Tolerance must be exercised in those areas. But one

cannot treat doctrinal areas as matters of opinion! Lucado does—and desires all to follow him.

Ponder, though, what Lucado further declares. He cites Mark 9:38, and asks, “What do you do about good things done in another group?” (p. 166). He briefly commends his “heritage” in the congregation in which he grew up. But, that is not the only commendation he gives.

I deeply appreciate my heritage. But through the years, my faith has been supplemented by people of other groups. I wasn’t long on God’s ship before I found encouragement in other staterooms.

A Brazilian Pentecostal taught me about prayer. A British Anglican by the name of C. S. Lewis put muscle in my faith. A Southern Baptist helped me understand grace.

One Presbyterian, Steve Brown, taught me about God’s sovereignty while another, Frederick Buechner, taught me about God’s passion. A Catholic, Brennan Manning, convinced me that Jesus is relentlessly tender. I’m a better husband because I read James Dobson and a better preacher because I listened to Chuck Swindoll and Bill Hybels (p. 167).

Amazing, isn’t it? One calls to mind the words of our Lord in Matthew 15:9: “But in vain they do worship me, teaching *for* doctrines the commandments of men.” When the brethren met in Acts 15 to discuss the circumcision question, they did not compromise the truth for “acceptance.” In fact, they wrote, “For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things” (Acts 15:28). Denominationalism does not follow this simple guideline. Creeds, catechisms, councils, and conventions have obscured or obliterated the Word from the minds of many. Denominational preachers have contributed to the present situation. Consider the words of the late G. K. Wallace, a towering preacher of this century:

In Acts 18:24-28, we have the record of a great preacher who was only partially teaching the truth. Apollos was a good man, but he was mistaken. He was an eloquent man, and so are many denominational preachers...Apollos was mighty in the scriptures, and so are many denominational preachers. They can preach great sermons on the deity of Christ, the virgin birth, the resurrection, and fundamental Christian living. Apollos was instructed in the way of the Lord; so are denominational preachers. Many of them are graduates of great seminaries of ministerial preparation. One may be fervent in the spirit but not according to knowledge (Romans 10:2). Emotionalism must not be mistaken for Christianity.

Apollos taught diligently the things of the Lord. Denominational preachers are very diligent and know accurately the things concerning the life of Christ. Apollos knew only the baptism of John. Even though he was right in these other things, he was wrong in regard to his baptism. Denominational preachers as a rule are in error on the subject of baptism. They may be eloquent, diligent, and zealous; but on baptism they are wrong (*Autobiography And Retirement Sermons*, p. 157).

Brother Wallace was right on target, as usual. Would to God we had more like him, and not like Lucado!

It is indeed interesting that Lucado refers to Bill Hybels. Hybels is the preacher for the Willow Creek Community Church in Illinois. Could it be that Lucado desires we all follow that mold? The explosion of such churches across the country has influenced some in the Lord's church to imitate them.

In the section, "Examine the Fruit and the Faith," Lucado attempts to put a semblance of restriction on his wide view of fellowship. He asks, "What do you do when you see great works done by folks of other groups? Not divisive acts, nor heretical teachings, but good works that give glory to God?" He goes on to quote Mark 9:39, and says, "Jesus was impressed with the man's **pure faith** ('who uses my name') and his **powerful fruit** ('to do powerful things'). His answer offers us a crucial lesson on studied tolerance" (p. 168, emphasis in original).

Lucado goes on to say, "What does it mean to do something 'in the name of Jesus'? It means you are under the authority of and empowered by that name" (p. 168). This is true, as far as it goes. But he does not go far enough.

But there are believers in many different heritages who cast their hope in God's firstborn Son and put their faith in the cross of Christ. If they, like you, are trusting him to carry them to the father's [sic] castle, don't you share a common Savior? If their trust, like yours, is in the all-sufficient sacrifice of Christ, aren't you covered with the same grace?

You mean they don't have to be in my group? No.

They don't have to share my background? They don't.

They don't have to see everything the way I do? Does anyone?

What is important is their fruit and their faith (p. 169).

The apostle Paul goes much further on this matter of authority. In Colossians 3:17 he writes, "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.” Everything we do or say in religion must have Bible authority! The only way we can know we have the authority of Christ is to look in the Word of God. Listen to the Lord: “Not every one that saith unto me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven; but he that doeth the will of my Father which is in heaven” (Mat. 7:21). Jesus plainly says, “If ye love me, keep my commandments” (John 14:15).

Consider further the words of Lucado:

It should be simple. Where there is faith, repentance, and a new birth, there is a Christian. When I meet a man whose faith is in the cross and whose eyes are on the Savior, I meet a brother. Wasn't that Paul's approach? When he wrote the church in Corinth, he addressed a body of Christians guilty of every sin from abusing the Lord's Supper to arguing over the Holy Spirit. But how does he address them? "I beg you, brother and sisters" (1 Cor. 1:10) (p. 169).

However, Paul addressed a group of people who had all done the same thing in **becoming** Christians. “And many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized” (Acts 18:8). They didn't pray the “sinners's prayer,” they didn't keep the “7 promises of a Promise Keeper,” and they didn't have a “Holy Week” in which they invited people from different denominations to worship. They were admonished by Paul to stop their divisive practices! How different it is, indeed, from Lucado.

Is God asking us to do anything more than what he has already done? Hasn't he gone a long way in accepting us? If God can tolerate my mistakes, can't I tolerate the mistakes of others? If God allows me, with my foibles and failures, to call him Father, shouldn't I extend the same grace to others? In fact, who can offer grace except those secure in the grip of grace? If God doesn't demand perfection, should I? (p. 170).

No, God doesn't demand perfection (that is, sinless perfection), but He does demand obedience.

And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him (1 John 2:3-5).

Can language be any clearer? We must keep the Word of Christ. Can the denominational world say, with a straight face, that they are?

Can Lucado, with a straight face, declare those who have been sprinkled to be his brethren? He has. He does.

A few final thoughts are in order. First, the time has come when all faithful brethren must stand up and oppose such teaching as given by brother Lucado. This is not merely a difference of opinion; it has to do with the identity of the church. Our voices must be heard.

Second, brethren need to boycott all books and literature by Max Lucado. Granted, his material will still sell in the denominational world and among our left-wing brethren, but those who may be unsuspecting do not need to be exposed to such teaching.

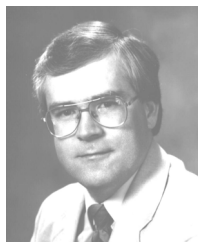
Third, the Lord's church must declare the whole truth of God concerning salvation, the church, and fellowship. We have a responsibility to generations yet unborn. Further, those in sin must come to a knowledge of the truth, that they might be saved.

Lucado's words, while disturbing, are no different from the rest of the radical left of the church. His words, both on radio and in print, will prove to be the "albatross" around the necks of the leaders of the left. I believe his words have also sounded the death knell of the movement. May we all pray to God that such is the case.

WHO IS MY BROTHER?

BY F. LAGARD SMITH

H. Daniel Denham



H. Daniel Denham was born in Pensacola, Florida. He is married to the former Barbara Kay Stancliff, and they have three children: Shawn, Trevor, and Megan. He graduated from the Bellview Preacher Training School under the direction of William S. Cline in 1977. Daniel has served as an evangelist for congregations in Florida, Tennessee, and Texas, and has done mission work in Taiwan. He currently serves with the church of Christ in Roanoke, Texas, as evangelist. He is a staff writer for the *Firm Foundation*, has authored numerous articles for the *Defender* and other brotherhood publications, and appears on several lectureships each year. He has authored two tracts

published by the Bellview Church of Christ in Pensacola.

“AN ENIGMA WRAPPED UP IN A RIDDLE”

“An enigma wrapped up in a riddle” was the description given by Winston Churchill of the mysterious riddle that was the Soviet Union. The expression captured the mystifying effect created by the often self-contradictory nature of Soviet political activities.

The same phrase can be used to describe the activities and beliefs of various people who have appeared upon the scenes of Church History. Such is the case of brother F. LaGard Smith, professor of law at Pepperdine University in Malibu, California. He is the author of numerous books and has spoken on a number of lectureships over the last several years. It is mystifying to try to sort out what Smith really believes on certain matters!

F. LaGard Smith, by several means, has raised serious questions relative to his core beliefs and teachings. Two of his books have especially occasioned much controversy. These are *Baptism: The Believer's Wedding Ceremony*, and *Who Is My Brother?* He lays the ground work in his book on baptism for the latter work on fellowship.

The purpose of this chapter is both to review and respond to his most recent work, *Who Is My Brother?* This effort is undertaken with no personal animus toward brother Smith, but his book holds some very unscriptural and dangerous ideas. That this book contains some

good material, especially in his first couple of chapters, cannot be denied. The benefit these portions bring to the book are nullified by the error which constitutes its main line of argument and bulk of its content. The portion containing the open letter to Max Lucado pleading with him to back off from his “faith only” heresy raises the question as to who is more confused about what he believes on fellowship—Lucado or LaGard?

At the outset, it should be noted that he uses the deviously errant New International Version as his primary text for quotation. One should also observe the special note entitled, “With Appreciation” at the beginning of the book, as it provides a list of some of those who influenced its writing (and may in part explain the reason for the position held by Smith). There may be those listed who are in disagreement with some or even much of what Smith has written in the book, as also may be the case of some listed on his “Acknowledgments” page in the preceding work. If so, they should clarify their own positions on these matters. If there are areas of substantial disagreement with Smith, then they need to state so publicly. The nature of the statements of appreciation suggest a considerable amount of solidarity in their views. The endorsement especially of such men as Jim Woodroof and Jeff Walling hardly instills confidence in the book. Also the participation of the liberal faculty and of the students of the Sunset School of Preaching in “challenging” the thinking of Smith does not evoke belief that a genuinely good contribution came out of that endeavor.

AN ENLIGHTENING BUT INSULTING INTRODUCTION

The “Introduction” establishes its theme. It is both enlightening and, yet, insulting in nature. It is enlightening in that it gives some insights into the thinking of brother Smith relative to problems being confronted today on fellowship. Some of the fallacies in his thinking on fellowship have been the paeans of some of the present-day chieftains of ultra-liberalism in the church. It is insulting in that it is an affront to faithful brethren who have stood their ground against the change agents in the church. It swallows the curdled diatribes of those who pose themselves as being more *loving*, etc., and regurgitates them in the form of a *new*, unique study of the subject of fellowship.

In his “Introduction” Smith writes, “For some years now, I have become increasingly concerned that our noble commitment to doc-

trinal purity has had the unwelcome side-effect of producing an unhealthy addiction to infighting and division.” He adds, “A pervasive party spirit, church splits, acrimonious brotherhood papers, and divisive issues of every kind have made a mockery of Jesus’ plea for unity among his followers.” He then explains the purpose behind the title of the book, by stating:

In fact, in the name of doctrinal purity many among us have drawn such exclusive lines of fellowship that so-called “erring brothers” on the other side of those lines might not even be regarded as genuine brothers at all. Hence the title question: Who is my brother? (7).

He praises our “noble commitment to doctrinal purity,” but then proceeds to take to task brethren who are committed to just that! It is the commitment that has produced the “unwelcomed side-effect of producing an unhealthy addiction to infighting and division,” he opines. The implication of that statement is that the commitment must somehow itself be flawed! Why, if we did not have **such** commitment, then we would never have a “pervasive party spirit, et.al.” Also take note of the reference to “acrimonious brotherhood papers.” Why does he not name them? Who are these rascals who are making a “mockery of Jesus’ plea for unity among his followers”? Evidently, it is not the liberal digressives who have divided churches and promoted schisms in the body of Christ. It is the mean, old “acrimonious brotherhood papers” and brethren who have “drawn such exclusive lines of fellowship” who are to blame. But who are they? Our brother does not say! We can only guess what papers and which brethren he has in mind. Commitment to “the apostles’ doctrine” may have been good enough for the church at Jerusalem (Acts 2:42), but it is occasioning terrible and horrific things today, or so we must surmise from his observations here. Just think, if Paul had not been such a stickler of “doctrinal purity,” how well he and the Judaizers might have gotten along? Galatians 5:12 must surely be the result of his “noble commitment to doctrinal purity” producing an “unhealthy addiction to infighting and division.” The “acrimonious” words of Philippians 3:2 and in 3:18-19 would have never seen the light of day. In fact, some entire books need not ever have been written! Also, what about these “divisive issues”? What are they? Who is responsible for causing division over them? Does Smith refer to the use of mechanical instruments of music

in worship, or, perhaps, the teaching of Calvinism by some, or the use of women in leadership roles in the church?

Observe also the charge that there are “brethren” who may be denied the rights of fraternity because they are “excluded” from fellowship by some! An “erring brother” is just that. When one, who has previously become a member of the body of Christ by his obedience to the gospel of Christ, is in error that affects fellowship, he does not cease to be a brother in Christ, but neither does his being a brother demand that he be fellowshipped while yet in his sin! This remark by brother Smith is really a red-herring and confuses the ideas of fellowship and fraternity.

He states on page 8 that his task in the book is “to ask the hard questions” and provide for us his “best understanding of God’s will, regardless of where it might lead.” He says, “Our task together is to think more critically than perhaps we ever have about issues that are becoming increasingly important as the church faces revolutionary changes at the dawn of a new millennium.” There are numerous materials that do a far better job of fulfilling this aim than this book. Goebel Music, Robert R. Taylor Jr., and Roger Campbell have authored outstanding works on fellowship. These brethren deal with the genuinely “hard questions” that should be addressed. My own files are filled with articles from the pens of sound and faithful brethren who have addressed these matters down through the years, but Smith plans to out-do them all!

He explains later in his introduction how the first part of his book was driven by the need to respond to brethren who were calling for “a wider fellowship with all who have faith in Christ, whether or not they have been biblically baptized.” He says these brethren are making an “extraordinary plea for unity with all who claim to be Christians.” He calls these questions “troubling” (8). But on pages 11 and 12, he suggests that the claim to be “the only Christians” may arise from fear or conceit. He writes, “As we enter this study of Christian fellowship, we need to check our motives.” He worries that “our interest in the bounds of fellowship is tainted by the fear that others may be more acceptable to God than we might wish” or “the fear that says our own acceptance with God depends upon everyone else’s being wrong.” He suggests that we might be guilty in our practice of fellowship of the same “ego” problem that belonged to the “horror

spun out from Hitler's fantasy of a superior Aryan race" or, perhaps, like that of the Ku Klux Klan and their "lynching blacks so that 'poor white trash' could claim superiority to *at least someone*." He says:

Call it a fellowship of conceit in which power and politics exercised selfishly (often cruelly) permit the ego-driven to feel a heady sense of being "the chosen one." With such elitists, lines are drawn to remind others that they don't deserve to breathe the same air as those who are putting on airs.

He tells us to be "brutally honest with ourselves" and then queries:

Is there any chance that our interest in the bounds of Christian fellowship is tainted by the conceit that we are the only one who *deserve* to be God's people? Or the conceit that we alone are acceptable to God because we alone have perfect understanding of the doctrine of Christ? (11-12).

While it may be the case that one could base his personal beliefs on unfounded fear or self-centered conceit, it does not follow from this that such must always be the case when one makes certain claims relative to his identity. For example, it is a simple fact that I am Daniel Denham. That is a statement of fact. I may be proud of my heritage, which I am, but that does not alter the fact! The specters of Nazism and the KKK raised by Smith do not alter that reality either! These systems involved false claims at the outset. If the Bible teaches what one must do to become a Christian, and it does, then one can know whether or not one is a Christian upon that basis; and if the Bible teaches that there is but one way in which one becomes a Christian, and it does, then one can know that **only** those who have availed themselves of that way are the **only Christians**! This is not ego, but is simple, undiluted **fact**! This entire section in brother Smith's book smacks of the liberal, post-modernistic nonsense that unless one knows **everything** about the doctrine of Christ, then he cannot be certain of anything! **If that be true, then why did Smith even bother to write a book about an area of thought of which he must confessedly admit he knows nothing with any certitude?** The early saints were called "the elect ones" and "the chosen generation [or offspring]" (1 Pet. 1:2; 2:9). When Christians in the First Century taught the facts concerning their identity, were they acting like Nazis or the Ku Klux Klan? If they could teach such, and not be guilty of such behavior, then why cannot members of the church of Christ teach the same today, and yet not sin? Unless Smith seeks to intimate

more about the identity of the church of Christ today as he views it than he is willing to state openly!

The remainder of his "Introduction" goes on in similar vein through page 14. He declares on page 13, for instance, "How dare we who once were *nothing* and *unworthy of mercy* draw lines of fellowship based upon little more than our own need for self-identity? How presumptuous can we be even to pick up the chalk!" However, he does not identify the ones committing this terrible atrocity against others. He reminds us, "It is God who does the choosing, not we." But it seems that our brother forgets that God has already chosen (Eph. 1:4), and that this choosing involved those who are *in* Christ! Now, how does one get *into* Christ so as to be *in* Christ?

We find the answer in Galatians 3:26-29 and Romans 6:3-18. It demands the presence of no abnormal fear nor unfounded conceit to answer it scripturally. God has done the choosing, but those who are His "elect ones" also chose to become such by obeying the truth, by the which their souls were cleansed (1 Pet. 1:22). Smith does assure us that there are those who are "outside the boundaries of Christian fellowship" (13), but what is the determining factor that places them in this state of being *unworthy* of our and his fellowship he does not clearly state. He quickly adds relative to fellowship, "But the most wondrous thought is not who is *out* but rather who is *in*!" This seems to be his basic theme.

Near the close of this section he writes, "The best we can do is to make a conscientious attempt to recognize those whom God himself has chosen." He warns:

Ours is to speak boldly about bright lines where there are bright lines (because they are bright lines) and to proceed with deliberate, prayerful caution where the lines are more blurred, knowing that the areas painted in grey also come from a divine palette (14).

The blurring of the lines, however, take place in the rhetoric and sophistry of men, not in the bright hues painted by the penmen of God! This talk of "grey areas" hearkens to the worn out, thread-bare jargon of moral relativists. It sounds flowery, but it expresses an odious doctrine. Following such reasoning to its logical conclusion eventually will place one in their camp. How do we determine what is a bright line as opposed to a grey one? Only the one making such a distinction can tell us. Will it be Smith who holds the key to making

that critical determination? Is the use of mechanical instruments in worship a “grey area,” for example? When brother Smith tries to refute infant baptism, is he saying that this is a “bright line” matter? Or is it just “an orthodoxy defined by” his “own particular doctrinal understanding” (12)? When he opposes the licentious and ungodly conduct of homosexuality, is he saying that the sinfulness of homosexual behavior is a bright line? If so, then what is the determining factor that makes it so?

PART I—“THE QUIET REVOLUTION”

Chapter One—“A Clear and Present Danger”

Part I of the book is entitled “The Quiet Revolution” and has much to be commended on its own merit, though there are some unsettling comments and ideas floated therein. Smith discusses the change that is occurring in the brotherhood concerning teaching on the subject of baptism, along with the subtle revolution that brought this into being in the thinking of many of our brethren. In chapter one, Smith after noting the change, stresses the tie between baptism and fellowship. He says, “The point is that one’s view of baptism contributes significantly to one’s view of fellowship. The more narrow one’s view of baptism, the more narrow the acceptable bounds of fellowship” (19-20). He then adds:

Or to put it another way, there is an interdependent relationship between baptism and fellowship: An exclusive view of baptism prompts an exclusive view of fellowship; whereas an inclusive view of fellowship demands a non-exclusive view of baptism (20).

He points out that many brethren are viewing baptism no longer as “essential to salvation, to becoming a Christian,” but rather “essential only to being fully obedient as one who is already a Christian” (21). In this new paradigm baptism is part of a *process*, “something the believer does along the path of discipleship.” The result is that “whatever the timing of one’s baptism, the committed believer is nonetheless said to be a brother or sister in Christ” (21). Brother Smith then shows quite well the contradiction of this new process theology relative to baptism. He cites a lesson on baptism delivered by an unidentified speaker at “a recent lectureship,” in which the speaker taught the self-contradictory notion that scriptural baptism can “just as easily coincide with” salvation “or follow after it” (22-23). He notes that the only logical position left to hold to as the line marking

the point at “which salvation is assured to the one who seeks it” is that of salvation by “faith only,” which Smith states, is a “doctrinal position which the speaker disclaims!” He terms such handling of the subject as “schizophrenic analysis” and refers to “the dubious distinction between *event* and *process*.” He declares forcefully that this is “an unbiblical distinction which led the speaker into an inextricable muddle of logic and doctrine” (23). He gives more examples of such self-contradictory teaching at this lectureship on the subject of baptism (23-24). He laments, “In today’s lectures, sermons, and articles, the language is loose. The logic, dodgy. The implications, troubling. And to what end?” (24). He then states emphatically:

If the conversion experience is a wondrous, divine gestation process, baptism is a definitive, womb-departing point of birth. A fixed point. A precise moment in the life of a believer which parallels the very death, burial, and resurrection of our Lord (24).

He writes poignantly of the wonderful connection between Bible baptism and the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ. He concludes that it is a “watershed event in which our sins are washed away by the blood of the Lamb.” He says that it is then that we cross “the line down the middle of the page between spiritual death and eternal life—the very instant in which the stone of captive sin is rolled away” (25).

The one problem with what Smith so beautifully writes here relative to the necessity of baptism for salvation is what he has already suggested as being possible in his book on baptism (especially the notion of a “common law” arrangement and the possibility of future clemency), and what he has written in the “Introduction,” not to mention some things he writes later on the matter of fellowship! What can keep our liberal brethren from concluding that Smith’s passionate plea for Bible baptism here is but the result of “an orthodoxy defined by” his “own particular doctrinal understanding”? How do brethren know it’s not just a case of “fear” or “conceit” motivating Smith to exclude certain from the forgiveness of sins? Truly, he is “an enigma wrapped up in a riddle!”

He rightfully points out how brethren on baptism are “wavering between two opinions” (25). He discusses the current unity movement and its aims. He notes how the movement has moved from the acceptance of all baptized believers to the acceptance of “virtually anyone

and everyone” as a Christian (25-27). He astutely is aware that some brethren would prefer to open lines of fellowship to the denominations at the expense of peace and harmony with their own brethren (27)! But, again, back in the “Introduction,” he seemed to place the onus for division on those committed to “doctrinal purity.” Is brother Smith now saying that there may be at least a **modicum** of fault for division on the part of some brethren who want to unite with just about anybody? Is commitment to “doctrinal purity” on Bible baptism essential? Smith seems here to be saying so, but wait! The mystery continues.

On pages 27-28 he suggests that the contact of many brethren with (and he places the word in quotation marks) “Christian” bookstores, “Christian books” by “Christian authors,” et al., may have played a role in the change of their thinking. Saying that “surely this brings us to the heart of the matter,” he then writes (but note he drops the quotation marks):

How can we say that Chuck Swindoll is not a Christian, or that James Dobson is not a brother in Christ? Are we really to believe that God will send C. S. Lewis, Francis Schaeffer, and John Stott to hell? These men have mentored us, prompted us, and stretched us in our Christian thinking, sometimes even more than our own preachers and writers (28).

He also refers to the family members and friends that many have in the religious world who are zealous in their beliefs. He asks, “Do we not see in them the same zeal for the Lord that we ourselves have—or, to our shame, an even *greater* zeal?” He refers to those who are hypocritical, though they may have been baptized scripturally in the past, and contrasts them with those who “appear” to possess the fruit of the Spirit in their lives despite the fact they have never been “biblically-baptized” (28). Just where Smith is headed with this is not completely clear. What began as a possible explanation for the phenomena of change on the position on baptism by some appears headed in another direction. This material sounds vaguely reminiscent of Mike Cope’s “crisis” sermon of a year ago in which he draws the conclusion that baptism is not essential to salvation simply because he (Mike Cope) believed (felt) that Billy Graham, Richard Foster, Tony Campolo, John R. W. Stott, and James Dobson were “Spirit-filled” Christians (cf., Cope’s article in *Wineskins*, April/May of 1997). Is this where F. LaGard Smith is ultimately headed? He asks, “Has God

really called us to extend fellowship to this baptized brother, yet refuse fellowship to our spiritually-minded friends simply because they have never been biblically baptized? Does that make sense?" He then later asks:

If New Testament baptism is to be the test of fellowship, with whom do you most closely relate spiritually: the ticket-punching, thoroughly-secularized brother we've just talked about or a committed, biblically-baptized woman preacher in the Disciples of Christ? (28-29).

He then asks, "Would your answer change if she preached a sermon calling upon the church to recognize gay marriages?" Or what about the brother who is unfaithful to his wife, but who "couldn't be more faithful in his worship and service to the Lord?" He asserts that there ought to be "different boundaries" in fellowship, "depending upon whether we're talking about *doctrinal* or *personal* purity" (29).

It should be noted that zeal alone does not establish the scripturalness of one's beliefs and practices, nor does it verify one's spiritual standing with God. The Jews possessed "zeal of God, but not according to knowledge" (Rom. 10:2). Also, if specific people go to Hell, it is because they **deserve** it (Rom. 6:23)! Gamaliel was a great teacher and a man of remarkable ability and insights on many subjects, but that did not make him a Christian! Despite how morally good he was, Cornelius still needed the gospel and that involved submitting to Peter's command to be baptized (Acts 10:48; 11:14)! What about the "pious unimmersed" (Acts 2:5) on the day of Pentecost? Peter told them by the authority of Christ to be baptized for the remission of their sins! Too, it should be remembered that the early church had its share of hypocrites, such as Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5). As to doctrinal and personal purity, the **same standard** applies to both (John 12:48; Acts 17:30-31)! I suspect that here is a place wherein brother Smith wishes to blur some of these lines. In 1 Corinthians 6:9 Paul lists the sin of idolatry alongside the sins of fornication, adultery, homosexuality, et al. Now is the sin of idolatry a problem of doctrinal purity or personal purity? Is it possible for one to teach that it is all right to commit fornication? What about someone who teaches a doctrine that implies it is all right for one to keep on committing adultery? Would this be a matter of doctrinal or personal purity? This is important in view of what he addresses next!

Brother Smith brings up the subject of marriage, divorce, and remarriage by positing scenarios to consider and apparent dilemmas to unravel relative to individuals within congregations as well as the differing “understanding” of congregations themselves (29-30). It is interesting that he should raise this subject, especially in view of his comments bemoaning the treatment that brother Homer Hailey has received in recent years because of his book advocating his version of the Bales heresy on divorce and remarriage (206-209).

By the close of the first chapter it appears that brother Smith seeks somewhat to blur the lines on some matters pertaining to the question of fellowship. From divorce and remarriage he proceeds to instrumental music, women wearing veils, women being appointed as deaconesses, orphan homes, clapping during worship, and “worship ministry teams singing contemporary praise songs instead of traditional hymns” (30). He states, “There is an endless list of issues over which we have parted fellowship through the years.” He says that it is not “helpful” to maintain that “we should divide over matters of faith, not over matters of opinion.” He calls this “a simplistic prophylactic against brotherhood divisions” (30).

But are there no rules of interpretation? Are we just left to make up our own dogmas and doctrines and just accept one another regardless of how silly they (and we) may be? Are there not matters of difference and matters of indifference (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8)? Why did Paul get so upset over some brethren’s *opinion* that the resurrection was past already (2 Tim. 2:17-18)? Did he not know that there should be room in our fellowship with those of differing eschatological *opinions*? What about one’s *opinion* about the necessity of baptism? How about one’s *opinion* about the mode of baptism, et al.?

Brother Smith asks near the bottom of page 30:

Finally, comes what may be the most intriguing question of all: What does God say to us about fellowship when our brothers and sisters in Christ begin to teach and practice open fellowship with those who have not been biblically baptized?

He then asks, “Or as they might remind us, What shall God say of us if we *refuse* to fellowship those with whom he himself is in fellowship?” It is easy, however, to add one more question to his questions: “What will God say to us if we knowingly fellowship them whom God refuses to fellowship?” Smith has admitted there are some with

whom we have no right to fellowship. They are “beyond the boundaries.” The question is: “What is the standard for fellowship to exist?” We shall see what his answer is, and it is surprising!

At the close of the chapter, he has a section entitled “Looking Ahead” (30-31), in which he outlines the course of study in the remainder of the book. He admonishes:

Just when we begin to think that the line of fellowship is clear and certain, we are suddenly whisked away into any number of fuzzy, shadowy areas of fellowship, many of which have already been suggested.

However, Smith fails to see that the *fuzzy* areas seem to be more a result of *fuzzy* thinking than actual, real dilemmas to be confronted on the subject of fellowship. They hearken to the kind of “story telling” argumentation that denominational debaters appeal to for evidence that salvation is by “faith only.” When it comes to story telling, no one beats a Baptist preacher! Are we to become enraptured with the art of this willy-nilly disregard for Bible authority for what we believe and teach? If so, then we may as well join the Baptists. They tell more entertaining stories! Subjectivism is unbecoming of people who profess to “speak as the oracles of God.”

The remainder of Part I continues to deal with “the present crisis.” He proposes to ask and answer the question, “Is fellowship really all that flexible?”

Part II concentrates on what he calls “Five-fold Fellowship.” He postulates that there are “five different levels” of fellowship, “each of which presents us with a unique (perhaps surprising) set of fellowship ethics” (31). He explains, “Only when we come to see fellowship on the broadest possible scale will we fully appreciate the intricacies of any lesser part. And here’s where it begins to get fuzzy.” And so the plot thickens as to where Smith is going. He proposes to ask and answer the query: “Is fellowship really so simple?”

Part III is entitled “Rethinking Sacred Cows.” He claims that it “invites us to dig deeper than we ever have into areas that have been either taken for granted or actually declared off-limits.” Why does it seem that every time someone comes up with a novel way of looking at something, they either try to couch it in the language of the wild-eyed mystic (delving into some secret rites of initiation) or they try to portray themselves as pioneers in the realm of thought—blazing new

trails and going “where no man has gone before?” Smith sets forth several interesting questions that he proposes to consider in this section. He asserts, “The time has come for open, honest, and critical thinking.” This assumes that little (if any) of such has been done by anyone on this theme till now! After all, some brethren (we are not told here just who they are or were) have taken some things for granted and have even declared some things “off-limits.” How or when were these things done? We will see if Smith enlightens us on these matters. In what way were *things* taken for granted? What *things* were declared “off-limits”? He proposes to ask and answer the question: “Is fellowship really what we’ve always taught it to be?”

Chapter Two—“The Ghosts of Faith-Only Arguments Past”

In Part I of chapter two (33-50), Smith gives the impression that he is launching into a stirring defense of the gospel plan of salvation in the face of the departures of some brethren to the faith-only heresy, but there are just enough twists and turns in the material to raise some serious questions concerning Smith. He begins by assuring us that the “quiet revolution” is real and quite widespread. He then makes reference to a lesson from a “well-known, highly-respected preacher in one of our larger congregations” who has taken up the faith-only doctrine. Though he does not name the preacher in question, there is little doubt that he is referring to Mike Cope and his *crisis* sermon. The preacher set forth two criteria that he claimed established the “circumference” of his “circle of fellowship.” These were: (1) “the way we live,” and (2) “the way we teach about the central message of the gospel.” Belief in the incarnation of Christ is then asserted to be the deciding factor involved in the second criterion. The preacher called that “a big one.” He points out that the ultimate conclusion of the preacher in question was that “the line of fellowship was to be drawn wherever ‘somebody starts messing with the essence of Jesus Christ and salvation in him alone’ ” (35). The brother in question appealed to the examples of Barton Stone and Alexander Campbell and how they maintained the view that baptism was for the remission of sins, while still fellowshiping denominational folks who had never been baptized, including Pedobaptists. He quoted from the Lunenburg Letter where Campbell posits the theory that some unbaptized believers are Christians just as much as those who have in full knowledge of the design of immersion submitted to it. He cited Campbell’s analogy concerning

human sight and the condition of being alive. The brother in question said that Campbell and Stone were “as committed to unity as they were to biblical baptism.” Smith states, “He urged that we, like them, should be committed to the ideal of non-denominational Christianity—‘eager to study God’s Word and obey it, in humility recognizing that we don’t have all the truth, in gratitude recognizing that **faith in Christ alone is what brings salvation.**” On page 37 Smith, after having given some of the material given by the preacher in support of his error, states the two key implications of the lesson, that namely:

- 1) Salvation *must* be by faith alone, because these are Spirit-filled, godly people who have not been biblically-baptized; and 2) since these Christ-followers in all the various denominations have been saved, we must fellowship them as God’s people, as brothers and sisters in Christ, as grace-pardoned participants in the kingdom of God on earth.

Brother Smith correctly shows that the preacher is guilty of an obvious **self-contradiction**. He is trying to affirm “two mutually-exclusive definitions of a Christian.” He has taught that one becomes a Christian by “faith only,” and yet “faith alone without immersion cannot save.” (It should be noted that the preacher fails to observe the inconsistency of both Stone and Campbell themselves in this regard. Authority in religion is not contingent upon what Stone and Campbell taught or practiced. On their behalf, it can be pointed out that they were coming out of sectarianism while those who profess to be like them in the matter of fellowship are going into it! At least, Stone and Campbell did have the many years of denominational dogmas and experiences to overcome **first** before extricating themselves of the megalith of denominationalism.) Smith observes that this view makes a mockery of the dictum, “In matters of doctrine, unity.” He writes with force and vigor: “And they all cry, ‘Unity, Unity,’ but there is no unity. Certainly no unity on the crucial questions of justification, salvation, and kingdom participation.” He writes about these matters with passion, but what is the relationship of the churches of Christ to the denominations, according to his understanding of things? As brother J. E. Choate inquires in the December, 1997 issue of *Contending for the Faith*, is he in agreement with his Pepperdine colleague Richard Hughes that the churches of Christ actually comprise a sectarian denomination?

In a section entitled “Will the Real ‘Faith Only’ Please Stand Up?” Brother Smith, stakes out a position that is somewhat confused or convoluted. He writes on page 37:

If only all the current talk about salvation by faith alone were aimed at a different issue. If, for example, the question is whether our salvation comes via a faith system or a works system, the answer must be a resounding ‘faith only!’ Of this there can be no dispute.

The basic problem with the nature of the question he raises and answers has to do with the definition of the terms involved in it. If by a “works system” he refers to a system based upon merit, then his point is well-taken, though the phrase “faith only” here is still ill-advised, but if he refers to works that God has commanded (and which therefore are works of obedience), then the contrast here between *faith* and *works* is false. The fact of the matter is that the kind of faith involved in our salvation is “faith which worketh by love” (Gal. 5:6). The concepts of justification by faith (Rom. 5:1) and justification by works (Jam. 2:24) are not mutually exclusive, but rather simply involve looking at the same thing from differing perspectives. The former contemplates the kind of faith which drives and motivates obedience, while the latter emphasizes the obedience driven and motivated by that kind of faith.

It is the next paragraph of his book that causes the reader to wonder just how he is using *works*. It appears that he is granting the sectarian view, but it seems to be more than **simply for the sake of argument**. Thus, he says: “Nor should we ever fall for the argument that baptism is a ‘work,’ as if it somehow nullifies salvation by grace. Are we to believe that anything we do in response to God’s grace is a ‘work’?” (37-38). He points out that faith itself, under such a definition, would constitute a *work*, and cites John 6:29 in support of this conclusion. However, Smith has taken an off-ramp on the entire issue of faith, works, and grace. In seeking to establish the validity of baptism within the scope of salvation by grace, he has fallen into the position of some that neither baptism nor faith is a work. He unnecessarily grants the sectarian notion that *works* are anti-thetical to grace. There is no problem affirming that faith and baptism are *works* in that they are works which God has commanded. Nor should we shrink from the basic definition of a work as being something one does. The central issue is whether or not the *work* in question is what God has

commanded under the law of Christ (the gospel) in order for one to obtain the salvation of his soul! This determines whether or not it is a *work of merit* or one of *obedience*! The New Testament affirms the essentiality of obedience to one's salvation (Mat. 7:21-27; Heb. 5:8-9; Rev. 22:14). Baptism puts one "into" Christ (Gal. 3:26-27); so he is "in Christ," where he has the forgiveness of sins "according to the riches of his grace" (Eph. 1:7). Salvation by grace does not preclude baptism. Smith is so concerned and distracted by the possibility that some might label him a *legalist* that he has sought what appears to him a safer position to occupy. But in trying to take baptism out of the realm of being a *work*, and thus placing it beyond the parameters of the dispute, he takes a posture which logically undermines the evident force of James 2:18-26 and other such texts (John 6:29; Phi. 2:12; Gal. 5:6 included). In fleeing Babylon, he runs past Jerusalem! The problem is with the broad and imprecise definition of *legalism* which liberalism is wont to use to bolster the cries for rebellion against biblical authority. He does rightfully protest the *divorcing* of faith and baptism clauses from one another (38, 39).

On page 39 brother Smith discusses briefly "Lessons from Reformation History." He states at the beginning of this section:

It would shock a lot of people both in our fellowship and beyond to learn that when Martin Luther spoke of "faith only" he was referring to a *system of faith* as opposed to a *system of works*. (It was Catholicism's works-oriented religion against which the reformers protested).

He then points out how Ulrich Zwingli's view of baptism being "symbolic rather than transactional" eventually gained prominence over the higher view of baptism espoused by Luther. This position is correct **as far as it goes**. Luther held the view that baptism was essential for entry into the Kingdom of God and for cleansing from sin, but he was frequently inconsistent in the matter. His rejection of James as a "straw epistle" because of the conflict that he perceived to exist between that epistle and those of Paul on the subject of *works* evidences an improper understanding of the doctrine of salvation! In actual practice, too, there was some confusion in teaching by the early Lutherans, including Luther himself in the latter period of his life, as to precisely when one received remission of sins. Luther was also errant on the mode of baptism and practiced the sprinkling of infants. The inconsistency of Luther (and John Calvin for that matter) without

doubt had the effect of aiding the rise of the symbolic theory of baptism held by Zwingli. The symbolic view had been earlier espoused by both Augustine and Erasmus, who maintained strong influences in the the thinking of many of the reformers. A more thorough discussion of the matter is found in Prof. Reinhold Seeburg's excellent work *Textbook on the History of Doctrines* (pp. 282-286; 316-317). Compromise with error or the adoption of errant views or practices always has the tendency to lead to more compromise and the acceptance of more egregiously errant doctrines. Of this fact brother Smith needs to take careful note: for it explains in part why (for many faithful brethren) his book on baptism and this present work on fellowship have created much angst!

It is indeed ironic, that brethren professing to be "non-sectarian" and "non-denominational" are jettisoning the biblical view of baptism for the views of Zwingli and the symbolic view of baptism! Smith correctly observes the problems that Alexander Campbell faced in his trek out of denominationalism, along with the subsequent inconsistencies, contradictions, and puzzles that he wrestled with in his search for the Old Paths. He states that "[n]ot even Campbell could escape the fellowship enigma" (40). He adds:

He, no less than any of us, was caught in an inescapable conflict at any point where his earnest desire to find fellowship with spiritually-minded unbaptized believers led him to say that they were Christians as much as those believers who had "a cordial reception of immersion in its true and scriptural meaning and design."

Campbell was headed in the right direction, and his later writings show a much more well-defined and scripturally-oriented view of things than his earlier efforts. The liberals make the grave and fatal mistake of journeying with Campbell while he was yet in the wilderness of doctrinal confusion, but, unlike Campbell, they seek to camp there **permanently!**

The next section, "How Quickly the Water Has Evaporated," drives home the point that baptism is essential to one's becoming a Christian. Smith begins by stressing: "If in fact the true and scriptural meaning of immersion is that baptism is an integral part of becoming a Christian, then Campbell's analogy of a person without 'clear and full vision' fails." After appealing to John 3:5, Smith appropriately acknowledges that this verse "raises the crucial question both to Alexander Campbell and to us: Can a person be a Christian without

ever having entered the kingdom of God?" He then proceeds to set forth a defense for the essentiality of baptism to the new birth and salvation (41). Under the heading, "Getting the Cart Before the Horse," he establishes that "baptism is an essential prerequisite to forgiveness, salvation, and kingdom fellowship." He notes, "At that point Christian unity finds its natural boundary around all those who have been immersed in faith into the family of God" (41-42). He then admonishes:

By contrast, when one goes about it backwards—starting, instead, with subjective feelings about where the boundaries of Christian unity ought to be—the inevitable result is an end run around the many texts which speak so clearly about how we come into a saved, forgiven relationship with God (42).

He then challenges those who "think otherwise" to "make the case *first* for salvation on the basis of faith alone, without reference whatsoever to fellowship." He states, "Not only is that more sensible, it is more honest." "Backing into a faith-only conclusion," he correctly argues, "ignores altogether what Scripture tells us about the meaning and purpose of baptism" (42). He exposes the fallacy of trying to determine who is saved simply by the subjective perception of personal zeal and warns against a fellowship based upon such subjectivity. He concludes with the penetrating query that our liberal brethren need to ask as they plead for unity: "What kind of unity could possibly be achieved when it is built upon the shifting sands of, at best, scriptural misunderstanding; or, at worst, wilful disobedience?" (42-43). This is about as close as Smith comes in this book to the position defended and proved by Thomas B. Warren in his work *Christians Only and the Only Christians*. If LaGard is not careful, someone might accuse him of being "swayed by an orthodoxy defined" by his "own particular doctrinal understanding," or maybe of writing an "acrimonious" book due to "an unhealthy addiction to infighting and division!"

The next section of this chapter is confused and confusing. While brother Smith has properly defended scriptural immersion as the grounds for entrance into the kingdom and thus the beginning point of fellowship, he now seems to confuse fellowship with fraternity itself. He sets about to show how the proposed criteria of Cope also "gets the cart before the horse." While Cope's contention that a subjective perception, founded on a subjective standard we may add, of how

someone is living as the grounds for determining who is and who is not in the Kingdom is a false view, the position by Smith is likewise questionable. In the first paragraph he admits that one cannot live in wilful disobedience to the Word of God and “remain in the church’s fellowship.” He then chides the view of the former brother by emphasizing that “[w]hat it takes to be *fellowshipped* is not simply the opposite of what it takes to be *disfellowshipped*.” But in the next paragraph he states that “not even living disobediently is alone sufficient to kick a person out of the kingdom.” While it is true that “living disobediently” is not sufficient “to kick a person out of the kingdom,” it is sufficient for faithful brethren to withhold fellowship from the one who is living disobediently. It appears that brother Smith confuses the idea of disfellowshipping a brother with the notion of kicking someone out of the kingdom! Withdrawal of fellowship in that view becomes a type of excommunication, but this is **not** the biblical doctrine of withdrawal of fellowship! That this appears to be his understanding of the matter is seen by his statement:

For Paul the circumference of Christian fellowship is not defined by righteous living—as important as that is—but by whatever it takes to be “fellow citizens with God’s people” and “members of God’s household” (43-44).

The question here is: what does Smith mean by *circumference* as to fellowship? Does he have in mind those to whom fellowship may potentially be extended **given the right conditions**, including righteous living, or does he seek to confound the idea of fellowship with that of fraternity (the idea of brotherhood) in such a fashion that, logically, withdrawal of fellowship can never occur? Are we to conclude that the circumference not only sets the bounds of fellowship as to whom we may potentially fellowship, but it also prescribes that we must not limit fellowship from **anyone** within it? Is Smith intimating that withdrawal implicitly involves throwing people “out of the Kingdom?” (It should be noted that this view has been espoused before by others who quibbled that when one withdraws from a brother in Christ, he is *saying* by this action that the one withdrawn from is no longer a brother in Christ! This is a false assumption. One can be an erring brother in need of restoration, and even be worthy of the appellation “sinner,” cf., Gal. 6:1; Jam. 5:16ff.)

LaGard does a good job pointing out the fallacy involved in Cope's second criterion, belief in the incarnation of Christ (44). As he forcefully points out, there are New Agers who profess to believe in that! He then notes that there are seven *ones* stressed by Paul in Ephesians 4:4-6. If these are the essentials of Christian belief and practice for unity to exist, then one should observe that the one baptism is part of those essentials! This destroys Cope's conclusion that baptism is unessential to one's salvation.

The next two sections (44-48) concentrate on the importance of examining the context of any statement, whether from the early Restoration preachers (like Stone and Campbell) or from the Scriptures themselves. This would include the historical background and context of the words under our scrutiny, which is a very valuable hermeneutical principle. Relative to the unity passages of the New Testament, brother Smith observes:

Understood in their proper context, all of the unity passages in the New Testament presuppose a mutual relationship with Christ in which faith-prompted, redemptive, salvational baptism has played an indispensable role (46).

As to the early Restoration preachers, he observes the fact that the current unity movement improperly tries to enlist them in support of the faith-only dogma. He also observes that these pioneer preachers "did not have the luxury of hindsight as we do." He then explains:

For them the very idea of trying to restore New Testament Christianity was a fresh enterprise. In the process of emerging from traditional denominational thinking, they quite understandably had many false starts (48).

He concludes his thoughts on the pioneers with a sterling tribute to their efforts and by a strong rebuke of the current "faith-only" crowd among our brethren (48).

The closing section to this chapter raises the question in its title: "What To Do With Our Godly Neighbors?" Smith now addresses briefly the "crisis" of Cope concerning those whom he believed were "Spirit-filled" Christians despite the fact that they had not been scripturally baptized. He states in response to Cope, "We must honor their faith and then endeavor to teach them the way of the Lord more perfectly" (48). He then appeals to the examples of Apollos in Acts 18 and the "certain disciples" at Ephesus of Acts 19 to stress that here are cases of individuals who knew some truth but who needed to

submit to Bible baptism. Apollos was taken aside and “taught the way of the Lord more perfectly,” and the disciples were further instructed and were then baptized in the name of the Lord (48-49). Smith asks, “How can we have loving unity with our godly friends without telling them frankly that they are not yet in the kingdom?” He then poignantly observes, “Friends don’t let friends continue under the illusion that they’re saved when they’re not.” The rejection of the biblical view of baptism inheres in the current approach to unity with the denominations. Thus, LaGard warns that the true story behind the current unity movement is “about a doctrinal departure of disastrous proportions” (50).

While brother Smith’s defense of Bible baptism here is admirable and appreciated, his attempt to separate works of any kind from the plan of salvation is unsettling, and his comments on *fellowship* on pages 43 and 44 are disconcerting. Even his appeal to the example of Apollos from Acts 18 does not fully correspond to the condition of things involved with denominational preachers and people. Apollos was not a Baptist preacher but a disciple of John the Baptist whose followers had for some time a legitimate right to exist and function as **such** disciples. Neither the Baptist Church nor any other denomination has ever had a right to exist and **so** function!

Another problem lies in his use of the word *godly* to describe these folk. One of the basic assumptions made by the Unity Movement folk is founded upon a faulty definition of this term. The noun form of this word comes from the Greek word *eusebeia*. It basically denotes, “piety, whether shown to God or man.” Such is the evidence of the lexicons, wordbooks, and dictionaries from G. Abbott-Smith to Joseph Henry Thayer. In the New Testament it invariably is tied to and involves one’s carrying out his obligations to God and his fellow-man based upon the standard of God’s Word. A cursory reading of the texts using the term and its cognates will bear this out. The use of this word raises several penetrating questions. How can one be truly “pious” or “godly” and yet reject a clear and plain command from God such as we have in Acts 2:38? How can one be *godly* without having complied with the very standard which defines and delineates what constitutes godliness? If piety demands obedience to the Word of God, and it does, then how can one fail to obey that Word and still be pious in the biblical sense?

Chapter Three—"Not by Overnight Express"

Chapter Three furnishes us with what is his most perceptive and penetrating look at the current apostasy. He does a good job analyzing **some** of the basic problems which have contributed to what he terms a "theological coup" and "quiet revolution," though there is a notable lapse in his analysis of the history of the church of Christ during the war years (World War I and II) and their aftermath. He begins by noting that when military coups occur in foreign lands, "it may look as though it happened overnight, but what led to the moment of truth was put into place over a much longer period of time" (51). He then sets about to examine several "overall trends" that contributed to this state of things.

The first contributing factor is that of the lack of Bible knowledge by members of the church of Christ. He writes of the "Biblical illiteracy" which is prevalent in many congregations today, while reminding us how once we were known as "people of the Book." However, things have changed. He discusses briefly the pitiable conditions of many Bible classes and the move toward "sermonettes" in preaching to shorten the worship. The substance of the lessons he describes as consisting of "skim milk" (52). The conclusion to the section notes: "Whatever the issue, a biblically-illiterate church is a church perpetually poised on the brink of doctrinal disaster" (53).

He next addresses the consumer-oriented church-growth movement. He points out that the church in former years has been very evangelistic-minded and grew accordingly. Over time congregations ceased to proclaim the Word "from house to house or from heart to heart" (54). Growth during the period of the world wars was done through "evangelism by procreation," i.e., by members of the church having large families and then converting their offspring. This is only **partially true**. While large families aided in growth, there were great efforts and success during those years in carrying the gospel to others within the United States, especially in the deep South and in parts of the Midwest and California. The tremendous good accomplished and conversions wrought through the Tabernacle series of meetings at the Ryman Auditorium under the preaching of N. B. Hardeman; as well as numerous other joint ventures by congregations in many communities; the work of Marshall Keeble and his young troop of preachers whom he lovingly called his "boys," and other powerful evangelists,

like George DeHoff, Foy E. Wallace Jr., Horace Busby, F. W. Smith, H. Leo Boles, et al., who baptized thousands; and the efforts of local evangelists and churches, which churches grew far beyond the number of the “young’ns” that helped fill the pews, all made it possible for the church of Christ to become the fastest growing religious organization in America by the close of World War II. This was done despite the fact that the church had been sent reeling by the defection of thousands of members and hundreds of congregations to the digressives, the Disciples of Christ. The demographic change from the census of 1906 to that of some 50 years later is astounding. While the Christian Church and the Disciples began to contract and to lose members over the succeeding decades from 1906, the church of Christ grew immensely—far more than “evangelism by procreation” can account for. LaGard also fails to note that the **decline** in growth among churches of Christ followed hard on the heels of the Anti-movement (1950s & 1960s), which opposed congregational cooperation which had been so effective in communities, and the subsequent rise of neo-liberalism on the campuses of colleges, universities, and schools operated by members of the Church, including Smith’s beloved Pepperdine University (1960s & 1970s)! Some of the recent leaders of the liberals actually came out of the Anti-movement, wherein they had played a major role in disrupting fellowship among brethren. They could not have their way completely in that error, so they rode their hobby horses over to the liberal camp! The era of the 1980s and 1990s has mirrored in many ways the decades of the 1880s and 1890s, when congregations were on the defensive against the assaults of the old digressives, led by Isaac Errett, J. H. Garrison, R. H. Crossfield, and company. Smith would do well to familiarize himself with the history of the church during that era. An excellent work on that matter is Adron Doran and J. E. Choate’s masterpiece, *The Christian Scholar*, which examines the life of Hall Laurie Calhoun.

He does, however, accurately observe that the decline in growth in recent years has led to the current mania for *bigger* and *better* ways to entice materially-minded people to become members of the church. The use of gadgets and gimmicks has been the result. Eventually this led to what he terms “the Wal-Mart Syndrome.” The yuppie push for the filling of “felt needs,” which involved the search for congrega-

tions that would cater to their children in a *good* youth program and would combine this with a “cutting-edge preacher” and “an upbeat, exciting worship format.” He points out that the churches which adopted these measures *grew* by *amalgamation*. Churches began to mimic the Willow Creek Community Church of Bill Hybel and to conduct “market surveys” to find out what appeals to people. The subsequent change in congregations which *swelled* by this process affected their view and approach to worship and brought about the introduction of “seeker services,” designed to make the church “more inviting and user-friendly.” This new philosophy led to the introduction of dramatic presentations and a move toward popular music forms, including the use of mechanical instruments in worship. Ultimately, it affected thinking on the subject of baptism and, consequently, fellowship. Smith observes: “Apostasy happens when we pervert the idea of accommodation.” He implies that we should ask: “Are we accommodating people for the sake of the truth, or are we accommodating truth for the sake of people?” (This is a good question, but one that Smith needs to ask himself relative to certain positions that he holds!) He notes:

When numerical growth becomes more important than faithfulness to the Word, you can be sure that it is no longer God who is adding souls to the church. It is not church growth like Pentecost, but church growth at any cost (57).

Yet, brother Smith makes a quite puzzling comment himself. On page 55, after noting that some of our kids had even become “converts to an ever-more-enticing material world,” LaGard states that, “Some of them were simply bright enough to figure out that we weren’t exactly the dynamic New Testament church we pretended to be, and off they went in their disillusionment.” Does Smith mean to say that the church of Christ is only pretending to be the New Testament church, when in reality it is not—hence the disillusionment? Or is he concerned only with the *dynamic* aspect here? If so, why couch the entire matter in language which seems to call into question the church’s identity?

The next section confronts the question whether the changes in theology have been driven by the popular culture or vice versa. Smith contends that the former is the case, while some of his “theologian friends” maintain the latter view. He concludes: “What I can say with

complete certainty is that each washes the other's back" (57-58). He observes the fact of the conflict over hermeneutics is at the heart of the current change in doctrine, et al. The "New Hermeneutics" is by nature **subjective**, while the so-called "Old Hermeneutics" is **objective**, but Smith once more, as in *The Cultural Church*, pushes for a view that combines both the objective and the subjective. He amazingly postulates: "The truth is we need *both* the objective and the subjective. *Both* head and heart. *Both* facts and story. *Both* a church orientation and a Christ-centeredness. *Both* law and grace." Having laid this foundation, he says:

We may no longer be a people of the Book, but we are definitely people of the pendulum. Having an uncanny ability to swing from one extreme to the other, what we most desperately need today is *balance* (59).

What he calls his own "offering of Purpose, Principle, and Precedent," however, is a piecemeal sell-out to liberalism and the "New Hermeneutics" he professes to oppose! By its very nature, truth must be objective, not subjective. Subjectivity cannot be a proper standard for determining truth, values, etc. It involves implicit self-contradictions. The notion of wedding subjective elements with objectivity is ludicrous on the face of it! Are we to subscribe to a hermeneutical system that combines some elements of truth with fairy tales and fiction? Are we to accept the notion that there is a cogent and logical view of truth (and epistemology) which can combine objectivism and subjectivism? Is Christianity to be studied as a hodge-podge of myths, legends, and mystic stories in conjunction with some elements of truth? Now we are to walk "by faith" **and** "by feelings," I suppose! On what grounds does Smith place "a church orientation" at odds with "a Christ-centeredness" and "law" opposite from "grace"? Are we to conclude that "a church orientation" and "law" are *objective*, but "a Christ-centeredness" and "grace" are *subjective*? The attempt to view the struggle between the "Old" and "New" Hermeneutics as a battle between one group of people promoting the church of Christ and the law of God and another group promoting the Christ of the church and the grace of God evidences, at best, a very naive and uninformed understanding of the issues involved, and, at the worst, it is a covert attempt at compromise with error and an insult to brethren who refuse to have any brook with it! His comment commits the

“either/or fallacy” respecting the nature of the “Old Hermeneutic.” His statement fallaciously assumes that truth cannot be an extreme view. Truth may often be found between two extremes, yet it is not always the case. If it is the case, then he must logically reject theism and atheism and accept agnosticism, which is the view which is in the middle position. *Balance* at the expense of objective truth is reminiscent more of Hindu mysticism than Christianity.

He proceeds to discuss “The Seamless Garment of Scripture” at the bottom of page 59. He talks about “the extreme of objectivism” and “the extreme of subjectivism,” and then warns against moving from the former to the latter. He refers to the example of folk who try to appeal to a “cultural” view of truth (i.e., that each individual culture must determine what is true or not true for itself and that truth subsequently is not static) to justify the practice of using women teachers in public assemblies wherein men are present. He does rightfully point out that others would be “entitled to make the same cultural argument relative to any other issue” (59-60). He notes how “the cultural argument used by pro-feminist theologians is being used, word for word, by pro-gay theologians.” He cautions that once one adopts the cultural argument for the sake of “ecclesiastical change” he has opened the door for the argument to be used by those seeking “moral change” and that the homosexual movement is an example of this very danger! He states, “With only rare exception...every church that has expanded the role of women based upon the cultural argument is now struggling with pro-gay theology” (60).

He cites a lecture delivered “at one of our popular lectureships” by a “highly-regarded preacher” some three years ago and a lecture delivered on the same program by “another keynote speaker” (60-61). The former, in trying to be “more grace-oriented and caring,” was prepared to accept practicing homosexuals. The latter “launched against legalism, but ended up having swung the pendulum to its opposite extreme.” The latter lecturer then presented a form of anti-nomianism, by saying, “Paul’s gospel was evangelistic.” “Law-keeping erects barriers to evangelism.” “Rules get in the way of the gospel.” He saw “*a cappella* music, weekly Lord’s Supper, and, incredibly enough, baptism” as examples of “rules” that stifled evangelism! Smith observes the fact that such reasoning by these lecturers forgets that the Scriptures are like a “seamless garment.” He warns, “Pull out

one thread and it all unravels. If Scripture can't be trusted in one part, there is doubt throughout." He stresses that we should not permit "the subjectivity of the new hermeneutic" to cause us by its march "from seemingly innocuous issues like gender roles" to toss out "baptism in the name of Christian grace" (61-62). Brother Smith's observation is well-taken, except for the reference to "seemingly innocuous issues like gender roles." What may *seem* to be "innocuous" logically affects the structure of both the church and the home. Anything that undermines the divine plan for either is not **innocuous**, and should be viewed as the threat that it is! However, his warning against the moral and doctrinal implications of the new hermeneutics should not be ignored. He humorously concludes: "It's not just the Chinese Year of the Ox [1997, HDD]; it's also the year of the theological oxymoron: lawless grace; 'faith-only' salvation; and unbaptized Christians" (62).

Chapter Four—"Uncommon Common Cause"

Chapter Four serves as the transition into his discussion of his five different "levels" of fellowship. He begins by stating that had he been black, he would have most certainly marched in Louis Farrakan's Million Man March in Washington D. C, because Farrakan, despite being "a Muslim, a demagogue, and a racist," had "tapped directly into the heart of the black malaise" (63). Where he is angling with this shocking statement is the notion that "common cause" justifies some participation with others, with whom one otherwise may greatly disagree. He also appeals to the example of wars alongside of other people against a "common enemy." He states, "Common cause has a natural way of transcending diversity" (64).

However, the Scriptures provide a number of warnings against "joining in affinity" with certain folk. Does he not recall the league made by Asa with Benhadad of Syria against the Northern Kingdom of Israel, then under the reign of Baasha (2 Chr. 16), and the words of Hanani the seer to Asa (vv. 7-9)? Need we remind him of the horrible choice that Jehoshaphat made in joining up with the house of Ahab (1 Kin. 22; 2 Chr. 18)? What about Jehoshaphat's joining himself with Ahaziah of Israel in a ship-building venture at Ezion-geber and the Lord's reaction to that "common cause" (2 Chr. 20:35-37)? And what of the ill-advised hiring of mercenaries from the apostate northern kingdom of Israel by Amaziah of Judah (2 Chr. 25)? Remember the words of the prophet of God to Amaziah, especially as to how

God was not “with Israel” and how, if Amaziah persisted, God would cause him “to fall before the enemy: for God hath power to help, and to cast down” (vv. 7-9)? Or how about Ahaz’s purchase of help from the Assyrian butcher, Tiglath-pileser (2 Chr. 28)? Or are these *stories* simply cases where the “subjective” approach of Smith’s “not-so-new-hermeneutics” needs to be utilized?

LaGard chronicles some of his own efforts at “joining in affinity” with certain people and their works for what “good” could come out of “common cause.” He begins with opposing abortion and the common cause that he has with Roman Catholics on this matter. He does not state just how far his participation with Catholics in opposing abortion goes. Does he contribute to Catholic charities and other funds that may be utilized in opposition to abortion? Does he attend Roman Catholic services geared to raising opposition against abortion or participate in programs sponsored by the Catholics in such opposition? Two people may oppose the same thing but not necessarily work in such a close connection as to involve fellowship.

Brother Smith says that, “On several occasions I have been asked to speak at fundraising banquets for local Crisis Pregnancy centers supported largely by evangelicals” (64). He has gone and spoken at these dinners, but he speaks only on “the horror of abortion and how it is killing America’s soul.” While Smith’s anguish over the evil of abortion and his compassion for those touched by it is admirable, there are matters of grave concern here. There are questions that he needs to answer. (1) How were these centers structured? Were they sponsored by particular denominational churches or groups of churches? Or were they private businesses that receive donations from anybody? (2) Do these centers subscribe to a particular religious creed or doctrinal system, which they promote as part of their counseling? (3) In as much as these are “supported largely by evangelicals,” just how do these evangelicals support it? Is it done individually or congregationally, or even both? (Especially this is important in view of question #1! (4) Is it scriptural to do evil that “good” may come? Brother Smith bemoans the fact that members of the Lord’s church are not present at these dinners. While he unfortunately is correct that many do not go because they are indeed “pro-choice” (a better description is “pro-abortion” or even “pro-murder”), he fails first to

make the case for the scriptural basis for support of this way of opposing abortion!

He then addresses the appeals made by the “Christian media” for him “to talk about the evils associated with gay rights.” His use of *Christian* raises concern here and elsewhere. What “Christian media” is he talking about? I do not consider Pat Robertson’s “700 Club” an example of “Christian media,” though Smith evidently does (65-66). By definition Pat Robertson himself is **not** a Christian, not in the New Testament sense of the word! Smith contends that it is an oxymoron to speak of an “unbaptized Christian” (62). What is involved in one becoming a Christian? Is baptism for just any reason valid? Can one be taught false doctrine, believe false doctrine, and obey false doctrine, but still wind up in the right church? “Common cause” can become a smoke-screen for open fellowship! He refers to the “common cause” that he has “with charismatics, pentecostals, and evangelicals of every stripe” against the “outrageous perversion” of homosexuality. He has joined with them in fighting “not only by book and lecture, but also on the airwaves.” He confesses that these are, “Sometimes uncomfortable airwaves.” He then confesses:

Each time I have walked onto the set of Pat Robertson’s “700 Club,” for example, I have wondered what in the world I’m doing there. For the sake of the cause, however, I put on a brave face and do the interview.

He parenthetically states, “Christian television is one of few avenues I have to promote my books and my message to the kind of readers who care about what I’m saying.” He concludes, “Despite yawning doctrinal gaps between us, on any number of issues I have common cause with Pat Robertson” (65-66). Well, I too wonder what brother Smith is doing on such programs! His opposition to the “outrageous perversion” known as homosexuality is commendable, but are we permitted to do evil that good may come? In giving tacit support to the “700 Club,” Smith is bidding God-speed to Pat Robertson and thereby his error (2 John 9-11).

Is the common cause that he has with Pat Robertson more important than the Cause of Christ? While moral issues are crucial, do we have to sacrifice truth in other areas in order to uphold proper morals? Is the promotion of his “books” and “message” more important than obeying the Word of God?

Another point to ponder is the incongruity of his opposition to this form of immorality with his defense of brethren, such as Homer Hailey, who write books implicitly promoting adultery. One wonders what he would say if brother Hailey had written a book speculating about the permissibility of “same sex” marriages wherein either party is not a Christian! As LaGard says, “If, as it is said, politics makes strange bedfellows, sometimes moral issues can make equally strange bedfellows” (66). Some of his other “bedfellows” include: Beverly LaHaye, D. James Kennedy, and Louis P. Sheldon, all denominationalists.

He does a little bit of Brotherhood-bashing on page 66 in trying to defend why he hobnobs with these denominationalists. He states, “Regrettably, on issues such as gay rights, I have more common cause with believers outside the churches of Christ than within. We just don’t seem to care. Others do.” What kind of *believers* are we talking about here? D. James Kennedy is a Presbyterian minister who believes in “grace-only” salvation and who sprinkles babies! Beverly LaHaye is the wife of Tim LaHaye; they teach “faith-only” salvation. The Moslems oppose abortion and ostensibly view homosexuality as a perversion. Would Smith go on a Moslem program in opposition to these things simply because he would have common cause on these matters? If so, then where would he draw the line and refuse to participate with someone?

What about the remark made about brethren in the “churches of Christ” not caring about the problem of homosexuality? Where has brother Smith been hiding? He evidently is circulating in circles far different from me and a good deal of brethren who openly oppose, through a variety of means, the evil of homosexuality. There are other members of the churches of Christ, believe it or not, brother Smith, who have written very strongly against this perversion! It is the **liberal element** within the church of Christ which is suggesting that homosexuality may be a genetically produced condition and that we need a broader view of grace that we may be more accepting of such folk and their life-styles.

Brother Smith states that he only deals with the “collective interest in fighting homosexual activism.” He asserts, “When specific doctrine is not the issue of the moment, common cause transcends it” (66). This is an amazing rule of action! So Jehoshaphat was right after all,

and Jehu the son of Hanani the seer was just a legalistic, uncaring, and trouble-making stick-in-the-mud! (Read: 2 Chronicles 18:1-19:2.) Smith should have been there to plead the case of Jehoshaphat. Surely, the “common cause” of fighting against the perverted and wicked Ben-Hadad “transcended” the specific doctrinal issue of Baal worship! Brother Smith does inform us that he has “taken the initiative” to discuss “concerns as baptism” with his “comrades in arms on moral issues,” but he does so “off-mike and off-camera.” He says this is “the manner of Priscilla and Aquila.” So are we to conclude that D. James Kennedy and Pat Robertson are the equivalents of Apollos? I caution brother Smith to be careful in pursuing this line of argument by analogy any farther, or he will be compelled to admit that he believes these folk are Christians in the full and complete sense of that word, and there, ultimately, is not one whit practical difference between what he and Mike Cope teach!

LaGard next refers to the work of the “Christian Legal Society,” of which he is a member. He calls it, “a group of lawyers and law students who prize their profession of faith in Christ while also valuing their chosen profession of law.” He says that it “is not just a social organization.” He writes of it:

Members gather for prayer, Bible study, and lectures on matters of mutual spiritual concern. In support of religious causes, they write articles, make appellate arguments, and provide expertise when someone’s exercise of religion is threatened.

He adds, “It speaks well of them that they are often in the trenches fighting against the American Civil Liberties Union” (67). He goes on to speak of the separate gathering of “Christ-professing law professors” at the annual meeting of the American Association of Law Schools. At this separate gathering “papers are presented; panelists discuss issues of common interest; and participants share times of faith and commitment to God-ordained justice.” They have common views on “Constitutional authority..., church-state, and religious freedom concerns.” He writes, “If we sometimes differ regarding methods and means, nevertheless we begin from the same compass point.” He then says that, because they are “believers all,” they “have common cause.” Smith admits implicitly that the two organizations are religious organizations as well as social! What is the definition of a *believer* which he is using? He has already said that even New

Agers profess to believe in Christ. Can one genuinely and properly believe in Christ, but reject what Christ taught (cf., Mat. 7:21-22; Luke 6:46)? If these people are denominationalists, and he can (or at least feels that he can) actively participate with them in religious functions in this context, then why could he not actively participate with any denominational group in religious functions? "Common cause" would authorize such. Often, socio-religious clubs and organizations have a charter that delineates their purpose(s) and beliefs. Some even have a particular creed to which each participant must subscribe prior to gaining membership. Do these two organizations have such instruments of organization and membership? If so, what are they and what is their content? And has he subscribed to them?

Brother Smith next discusses his views of the Promise Keepers movement. After having observed some of the problems besetting both black and white families and homes today and stressing his own attempts to speak out on the matters, he writes at length on page 68:

It was with great excitement, therefore, that I began to hear about a burgeoning men's movement called Promise Keepers. Just imagine...football stadiums filled with 50,000-plus men, hugging each other, praising God, and committing themselves to male spiritual leadership. Unthinkable. Unheard of. An answer to prayer!

A further serendipity was the Promise Keepers' call for racial reconciliation. Here at last was a forum in which both blacks and whites could join together in confessing their abdication of male leadership. A Christian "Million Man March," if you will, Common cause on a spiritual level.

The reader will observe the use of "Christian" to describe the participants in the Promise Keepers' programs. Numerous articles have been carried in brotherhood papers documenting the identity, religious backgrounds, and denominational affiliations of the usual participants in these programs. The organizational structure of Promise Keepers along with other details have been provided. Also provided have been samples of their teaching, worship (replete with mechanical instrumental music, solos and choral music, testimonials, applauding, dramatic presentations, and other assorted hoopla), and even some of their inane antics, like one speaker riding out on a tricycle to the applause and laughter of the crowd. Smith does bemoan the sixth promise of the Promise Keepers' which makes this movement not simply a "crucial common cause" for the good of the home but "an

ecumenical call for interdenominational fellowship” (68-69). He states:

This one is tough. We’re not just talking about having common cause with other believers. What’s different here is the specific promise that the Promise Keeper will ignore doctrinal differences and embrace all other Promise Keepers *as brothers in Christ* (69).

He documents the incontestable fact that this is the very nature of the sixth promise! But what is really amazing is that Smith himself did not realize from the outset that the structure of the Promise Keepers’ system made this an **integral** part of its program! Nor does he realize that what he terms “common cause” quite easily can lap over into “an ecumenical call for interdenominational fellowship.” The two are not mutually exclusive! They can often be identical! He is concerned about whether “a New Testament Christian” can make such a promise as promise #6, but his argument from “common cause” opens the door for it!

Pages 69-72 provide further documentation on some of the false doctrines on salvation that has been promoted through Promise Keepers. On page 72 Smith apologizes for having to be so “negative” about Promise Keepers. He adds, “Take out the bits relating to the way one becomes a Christian, and both the book and the movement are inspiring. On the issue of male spiritual leadership we have common cause.” He finally says, “But when the line between common cause and an unbiblical ‘Christian unity’ is crossed, I simply can’t join with them. It’s that other promise I’ve got to keep—to be fully obedient to God’s Word.” However, brother Smith has so blurred the line between “common cause” and “unbiblical ‘Christian unity’” that he does not really know on which side of the divide he is! Are we to believe that his inconsistencies and self-contradictions are “grey” areas in fellowship?

Smith does observe, though “sadly,” the role that Promise Keepers are playing in undermining loyalty to New Testament teaching. He describes how it is “just a little responsible for the theological coup we are currently experiencing.” He notes how “our men (including many of our preachers) come home from an exhilarating, liberating week end at Promise Keepers,” but have “committed themselves to unity with ‘brothers in Christ’ who supposedly have been saved, forgiven, and spiritually empowered apart from being born again of

the water and the Spirit!" He then observes: "It is little wonder than that, on the subject of salvation, one cutting-edge preacher after another now speaks the language of Promise Keepers" (72). He also warns of the adoption of denominational phraseology which will enter pulpits through this influence. But he is a **bit** late with his warning; many of our brethren are already speaking "half in the language of Ashdod." Simply survey the lectures, sermons, and speeches at the lectureships and workshops conducted by liberal brethren, or read their books and periodicals! The shock and sorrow expressed by LaGard causes one to wonder where brother Smith has been these past few years?

Smith raises the question: "Did Christ pray for unity movements?" He writes: "I confess it may seem incongruous to join with even non-believers in common cause, yet refuse to join in a movement specifically aimed at ecumenical fellowship among all believers." He then offers the following as an explanation: "The difference, I think, is between *association* and *fellowship*. When I associate with others in common cause, I am making no statement (much less a *promise*) about kingdom fellowship." He concludes, "Even if the cause is righteous, the association is virtually as incidental as participation in party politics, business organizations, or the local Kiwanis Club's food drive" (73).

Well, it is not only "incongruous"; it is downright self-contradictory—the use of the terms "association" and "fellowship" notwithstanding! Smith admitted that his participation in the "Christian Legal Society" was more than just social! It involved gatherings for "prayer, Bible study, and lectures of mutual spiritual concern." The special gathering of the "Christ-professing law professors," during the meeting of the American Association of Law Schools, was designed as a time wherein "participants share faith and commitment to God-ordained justice" (67). I wonder also if Pat Robertson, D. James Kennedy, Beverly LaHaye, etc., consider the activities and programs on which they work together with brother Smith are just times for "association"?

It appears that *fellowship* in Smith's mind is simply a frame of mind. He *associates* with denominational folks by participating in their worship and work programs (many of which are invariably designed to further the influence and message of their particular sect

or denomination), but he does not *fellowship* them **in the kingdom!** Pardon me, brethren, but joining Pat Robertson on the “700 Club,” while he advertises his “ministry” and promotes his own agenda, even if he is there for other more noble purposes, just does not seem to be quite the same as door-knocking for the Republican Party or helping a secular club as an individual to gather can goods to feed hungry children! It is almost like brother Smith is practicing some form of science-fiction-related inter-dimensional shifting between his religious and spiritual *associations* with Pat Robertson and his “kingdom fellowship.” In fact, Pat is there participating with brother Smith, but he is not there in reality, either! Perhaps, if Pat would simply teach that baptism was necessary for one to be a Christian, then he could materialize within the realm of LaGard’s “kingdom fellowship.”

The next two paragraphs from Smith on page 73 give some clue as to where he is headed on the matters of baptism, fellowship, and the “unity meetings.” He does not have any problem with such meetings taking place “among baptized believers,” especially when they “generally” come “out of the restoration movement.” On the contrary, he says, they “have every potential for good.” His concern is over “unity meetings with just any and every church along the road.” Such an effort “is immediately suspect.” But even these may be permissible given his proviso that these meetings are “open to seriously discussing what it takes to become a Christian.”

At the bottom of page 73 he refers to “the latest fad” of the swapping of pulpits by some of our liberal preachers with denominational preachers. He observes that the exchanges take place with only Baptists, but as of yet with no Catholics, Episcopalians, Presbyterians, and Methodists. But where again has he been? Has he not followed the escapades of Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, and several others? They are farther along in these things than Smith has observed! Yet, he blithely continues to appear with these men on various programs and at various places in full fellowship.

Brother Smith rightfully is disturbed over the direction the trend to exchange pulpits evinces. It begins with using the “safe” Baptist preacher, because he agrees that baptism is immersion (also because many brethren have so little knowledge of the difference between Bible doctrine and Baptist doctrine that they believe that we are “closer” to the Baptists than most other people). Eventually, there can

be no stopping place, no line of demarcation! The ultimate end for some of these folks will be fellowship with anybody who professes to believe in some sort of a god or even gods, especially in view of their fondness for post-modernism and “the hermeneutics of suspicion”! J. E. Choate and Wayne Coats, among others, have accurately described these brethren as producing a “New Age Church of Christ.” Smith needs to “wake up and smell the coffee!”

Smith concludes, “So we must observe this careful caution: Common cause and Christian fellowship are not interchangeable.” He magnifies, “Common cause may at times transcend doctrine; but Christian fellowship, wrongly assumed, makes a mockery of doctrine” (74). Observe that his definite conclusion rests upon the assumed premise that “common cause” is merely a case of “association,” as distinct from fellowship. This assumption we do not grant. His view of “common cause” makes a mockery of common sense. If someone has a cause that he is concerned with or some program he wishes to promote, and he wants to utilize the help of people whom he otherwise cannot fellowship, then he should not think of it as fellowship, but by virtue of the common enemy or common aim he may call it “common cause”! Or if he wants to participate with someone in some spiritually-oriented program, he needs only look for some central point of agreement and call it “common cause.” Brethren, undoubtedly brother Smith has the sincerest of motives in his approach to “common cause.” His passionate opposition to abortion, homosexuality, and other evils of this kind are well-documented and commendable, but what would be the **logical** difference between what he is doing in the name of “common cause” and the two scenarios just given? What effect is his “common cause” participation having upon others, the people with whom he is participating and those who may be watching?

The final section addresses his use of *Christian* in this chapter. He admits that he has “used the term Christian in a number of different contexts.” He states, “In virtually every instance I have used the term differently from the way it is applied in previous chapters where the question was, Who is a biblical Christian,” et al. (75-76). He then goes on to list six different ways in which, he believes, *Christian* can be used. Because this kind of butchering of biblical terms may be employed by those in the world, it does not follow that such a practice

is right and proper. These misuses only serve to perpetuate the misunderstandings that our religious neighbors have concerning what the word means in the Word of God! Smith's use of "a biblical Christian" could be taken to mean that there is such a being as an "unbiblical Christian," (that is, one who is a Christian by some other process or standard). This only serves to confuse and mislead, especially in constructions where no specific definition is stated and the reader is left to surmise the definition being employed by the writer. Why resort to this new-speak, when the Scriptures are quite clear on the meaning of the term? Baptist faith is not Christian faith, properly defined! There surely are not different "levels" of being a Christian!

He compares his use of *Christian* with the Bible's use of the words *Israel* and *Jew* (76). But this comparison bears two great disparities. The Bible provides clear indications by the immediate context the specific connections of these terms in their sundry places. His use of *Christian* is not so clear and precise. He moves from one context to the next without the use of the necessary modifiers, figures of speech, and historic connections that serve so beautifully in the Bible to demonstrate changes in application.

Another disparity is the fact that the Scriptures never use *Christian* in differing ways. It always contemplates the people of God under the New Testament, and never is given **in any context** a broader or more pregnant meaning! LaGard admits that we should be careful to avoid "indiscriminate usage" of the word *Christian* lest it become "as convincing as the most cogent argument for wide-open Christian fellowship." He says, "If we merely assume that all things 'Christian' are of biblical extract, then we are greatly misled." But this confusion is exactly the result of Smith's toying with the word by moving indiscriminately from context to context between what the word scripturally denotes and what it has come to connote in the minds of people! He adds, "Confusion about the term *Christian* may be as responsible as anything else for 'the quiet revolution' regarding Christian fellowship." Notice the shift from the earlier reference to "wide-open Christian fellowship" to this latter statement on "Christian fellowship."

He then approaches *fellowship* from a similar vein. He takes the word and applies to it sundry meanings and connections from one context to the next. This *indiscriminate* use is responsible for some of

the misunderstandings on the Bible doctrine of fellowship that many of our brethren hold, and Smith's work on the subject does no real service in alleviating them! He contends that there are "varying levels of fellowship" (77). He has already admonished us not to confuse association with fellowship (73); he has also said that he is using "fellowship" like the way he has been using the term *Christian*. If *fellowship* is therefore not being used in the sense of "association" in his reference to some of these "levels" of "fellowship," then to what does it have reference? If he says that, when he speaks of fellowship as contrasted with "association," he is speaking of the scriptural definition of the term in that context, then why has he not made this clear? Why resort to a use of the word that bears no reflection in New Testament teaching, while trying to establish "varying levels of fellowship," when he has reference, in some of these cases, to the simple notion of "association"? If he is trying to prove that Christians, in the scriptural sense of the word, can have "association" in some limited way with people of the world in certain connections, then that would be granted (cf., 1 Cor. 5:9-10; John 17:15-16). However, with "varying levels of fellowship" and "association," we are all led to wonder just what he means by it! If he defines it, as he does, to include his concept of "common cause," then his definition of *association* is synonymous with *fellowship* and not distinct from it. The distinction he gives then on page 73 between the two is a distinction without a difference! Brother Smith admonishes on page 77 that this "five-fold fellowship" is "often-complicated" and the levels are "overlapping." He writes further:

Far from being a matter of "us and them," our call to fellowship requires nothing short of the wisdom of Solomon. If there is black and white (and there is), there is also grey. There are even multiple shades of grey (77).

Would Smith accept this same conclusion when it comes to morality? If morality is a matter of black and white (and it is), does it follow that there is also grey areas of morality—even "multiple shades of grey?" What would those be? Where do we find these "grey" areas relative to right and wrong? This entire argument opens the door for moral relativism of some fashion or other, whether it be Fletcher's "situation ethics" or Bentham's "utilitarian ethics." These

“grey areas” of *fellowship* are really the false shadows cast by a use of language that is more in keeping with post-modern philosophy.

The five levels of fellowship that he posits are reflected by a chart on page 77. Each of these serve as chapter headings for the book.

Universal Fellowship contemplates “the bond which we have with the family of man—the good, the bad, and the ugly.” This is fellowship based upon creation of and procreation through Adam (77-78).

Faith Fellowship, he says, “takes us one step closer to Christian fellowship but is still outside the boundaries of the kingdom.” This fellowship includes “all those who actively share our faith in Jesus Christ but who have not experienced rebirth according to the biblical pattern.” He adds:

Sadly, frustratingly, almost unthinkably—they are not part of the Family of God. However, because of their great faith in Christ they are like family and may be even closer to us in many respects than brothers and sisters in Christ who are only nominal members of the church (78).

Christian Fellowship “is fellowship with Christ himself, a relationship which comes into being when a person with penitent faith is baptized into Christ and thereby puts on Christ.” All of those in this level of fellowship have what he terms “in-Christ fellowship.” They are “washed, forgiven, and saved.” He states, “For all who are brothers and sisters in Christ, it is fellowship of the entire extended family, based not upon total doctrinal cohesion but upon the wondrous fact that we are all children of the same Father.” It is within this level where “*koinonia* (sharing and caring) fellowship” exists (78).

Conscience Fellowship “recognizes the fact that not all brothers and sisters in Christ have precisely the same understanding of how God has called us to work and worship within the kingdom.” He comments, “It provides elbow-room for the exercise of individual and collective conscience, even for enclaves of special ‘close family’ fellowship among groups of congregations within the wider extended family.” It is “an important subset within the overarching, more-inclusive ‘in-Christ’ fellowship that all Christians share” (78).

Congregational Fellowship relates to “the immediate family of Christians who work and worship together in local congregations.” It is on this level that “*koinonia* fellowship most directly manifests itself in mutual edification, participation, and sharing” (79).

He then refers to “table fellowship,” which is “both around the Lord’s table and from house to house.” This fellowship “makes possible a fellowship of heart and mind that binds the body together and even lays the groundwork for loving correction whenever discipline is made necessary.” Surprisingly, he says in the next paragraph: “Yet table fellowship is not limited to brothers and sisters in Christ.” He maintains that it is “a thread which runs throughout the entire tapestry of the human experience—with Christians and non-Christians, with believers and infidels, with saints, sinners, common folk, and criminals.” He calls it “a universal fellowship we share simply because we are human beings—a fellowship which we often forget in our haste to draw boundaries of faith” (79). “Table fellowship,” which includes the observance of the Lord’s Supper, according to Smith, is part of Congregational Fellowship but is not apparently limited to it. He states that it is universal and is really a “thread which runs throughout the entire tapestry of the human experience.” But Jesus taught that the eating of the Lord’s Supper would take place “in the Kingdom of God” (Luke 22:16)! Was the Lord guilty of forgetting this fellowship in His “haste to draw boundaries of faith”? Paul reminds us that there are some cups that we cannot drink with others and some tables that we are not to partake of with others (1 Cor. 10:15-21). There seems to be an important “thread” missing from Smith’s “tapestry.”

The entire position of brother Smith collapses on the basis of his own linguistic premises. He says that he is using “fellowship” like he has used *Christian*. But that is not how he describes each of these “levels of fellowship.” On the face of it, he employs the term in the same way for each; otherwise how could he speak of “five levels” of fellowship, as though there are five types or forms of the **one** thing? Yet he **implicitly** admits that the term is constantly changing meaning as one moves from one context to the next and sometimes **within** each given context! He would be dealing with at least five (given “table fellowship,” six—not to mention “*koinonia* fellowship,” which he somewhat differentiates from both Christian Fellowship and Congregational Fellowship though it is part of each) different “fellowships,” if this admission be granted. This involves, then, a self-contradiction on his part. Either he must provide a scripturally-based, static, and denotative definition for *fellowship* and give up on his shifting of

meanings (which then forces him to defend what he elsewhere rejects—the concept of open-fellowship), or admit that what he is calling “fellowship” in each context is something entirely distinct from the real meaning of the word. That obtaining, his book does not discuss fellowship in any real sense and is useless on the subject!

PART II—FIVEFOLD FELLOWSHIP

Chapter Five—Universal Fellowship: The Family of Man

This chapter does not offer much in the way of substance on fellowship. As noted above, unless brother Smith is applying here the scriptural definition of the word to the condition of the universal brotherhood of man as created beings, then the entire matter is moot. Surely, he recognizes the logical difference between the extension of fellowship to Christians and the relationship that is sustained by fellow, faithful Christians as opposed to that with Devil worshippers, Moslems, Hindus, and pagans of various sorts! If not, then he needs to read 1 Corinthians 5:9-10 and 2 Corinthians 6:14-18 carefully. Smith should know the difference between the act of eating a meal with someone and the act of fellowshiping through that very means. The eating of a meal does not demand, **in and of itself**, the idea of fellowship in the full and proper sense of the word, though eating a common meal together—as in the **agape** feasts of the New Testament—can be an expression of fellowship between the parties involved. All cases wherein people are eating together **do not constitute** cases wherein fellowship in the biblical sense is occurring. There may be some other reason for the meal to be eaten together.

Scriptural fellowship with others is based upon fellowship first and foremost with God the Father and Jesus Christ by one’s continually “walking in the light” (1 John 1:1-7). It is interesting that a book like *Who Is My Brother?*, which is intended to discuss the Bible doctrine of fellowship, fails to examine this text which sets forth the fundamental premise of fellowship! Where there is no faithful compliance with the standard of God’s Word (Psa. 119:105, 130), then there exists no basis for true fellowship! Fellowship scripturally requires some point or basis of agreement (Amos 3:3), and that basis is the doctrine of Jesus Christ (2 John 9-11; Rom. 16:17). There follows from this the principle of **inclusion** and the principle of **exclusion** in fellowship. Those with whom—and only with whom—the Lord has fellowship are those with whom we have fellowship (hence the princi-

ple of inclusion), and those with whom the Lord does not have fellowship we cannot knowingly have fellowship with them (the principle of exclusion)! Fellowship in the Bible properly involves not only the mutual state or condition of fellowship with Deity and thereby with one another but also the **specific actions** expressive of that mutual condition and the right attitudes that **must** attend it. This is what 1 John is especially concerned with!

Smith writes about *our* joint participation with people of the world in various areas of our everyday lives (88-89). He points out that “we rake leaves together, work in polling stations together.” Where he is headed and what this proves he does not really say. He writes: “By and large it doesn’t seem to matter if they are divorced and remarried unbiblically, or knock back a six-pack while watching the Super Bowl, or subscribe to *Playboy*.” If his point is that we have contact with people in the world, then that is a “no brainer,” but if his purpose is to imply that there is a basis for fellowship in the real sense of the word, then he needs to state so.

On page 90 he returns to this contrived notion of “table fellowship.” Yes, Christ ate with sinners and publicans (91), but does it follow from the practice that He was in *fellowship* with them in the true sense of the word? Did He eat with them to show approval of their spiritual condition? Or did He use the opportunity to be with them in order to teach the gospel to them? To ask the question is to answer it!

Smith next addresses the matter of Moslems, Hindus, and Jews a bit more closely and extolls the fervor and “faith” which these folk possess for their particular religious views. Again he fails to provide us with a firm, **unequivocal** definition of what he means by *fellowship*. Smith is a law professor and has served as a prosecutor. He knows the value of words and the importance of properly defining one’s terms in setting forth his case. A powerful and logically convincing brief depends upon the cogency of its arguments and upon the clarity of the words in which it is couched. Surely the task is not beyond his capacities! He is a very capable writer and well-adept at expressing his position on other subjects. But his book on fellowship limps along supported by uncharacteristically lame arguments and vague definitions. There is a great difference in appreciating the fact that someone is spiritually-oriented and accepting them into our

fellowship on those terms alone! If this is not where brother Smith is ultimately headed with this, then he needs to clarify his position! The reader will remember Smith's earlier discussions on what he calls "common cause," and the disturbing implications of what he is saying. I believe that his view of "common cause" bears more the idea of fellowship, whether he realizes it or not, and that this is the reason for his convoluted thinking on the subject!

At the close of chapter five he stresses that he is closer to "actively professing 'Christians,'" as to the level of fellowship that he has with them, than to the Moslems, Hindus, and Jews. He calls it an "*exhilarating* faith fellowship" and also "an almost always *frustrating* faith fellowship." This *fellowship* is contingent upon "mutual faith in Christ." But there can be a big difference between professed faith in Christ and the one faith which Christ gave. There is also a difference in the nature of the kind of personal faith that people may possess. Which faith places us into fellowship with God and with all those with whom God has fellowship? What kind of personal faith is involved in one's salvation?

Chapter Six—Faith Fellowship: Like Family

LaGard now turns his attention to the matter of "Faith Fellowship." He says that this is almost like being family but not quite. Individuals within this "level" of fellowship are very close, but they are not related, spiritually speaking! He stresses at the outset the loneliness and longing for fellowship that he and his wife, Ruth, have felt when in England. He writes about the efforts which they have made to worship "with Christians" (99-100). He then informs the reader of the "Ashton-under-Hill Free Church," which meets in a chapel not far from their English cottage. He emphasizes how scripturally organized they are and how they observe the Lord's Supper "each first day of the week." He also points out that he observed a baptism performed at the church "with such emphasis and thoughtfulness that it put our all-too-perfunctory baptisms to shame" (100-101). He does not reveal, however, what they specifically teach about baptism as to its purpose.

He extolls their worship in glowing terms. He says, "If they differed from us in any major respect apart from any doctrinal understanding, it was in what I sensed to be a much more profound worship experience" (101). He writes about the beauty and fervor of their

prayers, etc. In the process, he tarries long enough to take a swipe at “churches of Christ.” For example, he writes, “Although the believers at Ashton are far less articulate on doctrinal issues, their memorized familiarity with Scripture far exceeds our own” (101). He writes about a “*five hour period of prayer*” that was held on behalf of “a devout woman in the congregation” who was dying of cancer. He says concerning this service: “Never have I been part of such a touching gathering of believers. Certainly not among the churches of Christ” (102). But he never tells us what this proves!

“The singing,” he says “is accompanied by instruments—at least primarily.” *Spontaneously-led songs* are most frequently without mechanical accompaniment. He says: “Their smaller worship intimacy was a refreshing contrast to the large, traditional congregations back home that seemed to be stifled by routine worship ritual.” To what does he have reference in the phrase, “stifled by routine worship ritual?” Such phraseology has become all too common among brethren seeking to set aside the observance of the five items of worship bound by the New Testament. The call for *spontaneity* in worship is also a rallying cry for the change agents. Relative to singing, it means that whoever, sometimes without any regard as to sex, may lead a song on the spur of the moment. If this is the full practice at “Ashton-under-Hill,” he does not say. If Smith is decrying the lack of substance in worship on the part of some brethren rather than the form (acts), then he should clearly say so. Can worship become “stifled” or “stale” by a half-hearted approach? Of course it can, but let us be careful in our criticisms of what our liberal brethren call *traditional* worship forms or *styles*! Smith goes on to write of “the Ashton believers,” as he calls them: “Even their spontaneous informality was accomplished with such reverence that none of the clap-happy, trendy worship of more recent years could hold a candle to it.”

On page 103 there is a statement made by brother Smith that is quite disturbing. He writes: “As for the instruments, I tried to content myself with the thought that while everyone else was singing *with* the instruments, I was singing *without* them!” He adds, “Of course that didn’t solve the problem for someone like myself who is so strongly opposed to musical instruments in worship.” He says, “Their presence continually marred an otherwise enviable worship ideal.” Is he saying that he participated with them in their singing only when **a cappella**

music was involved? Or is he saying, as that **in his mind** he was telling himself that he was not singing with the mechanical instruments though his voice was? The former view alone is inconsistent with a *strong* opposition to the instrument. How could one participate in any meaningful way in the worship of a denominational body and be consistently opposed to error in their practices. Is it all right to eat the “Lord’s Supper” with them just as long as you refuse to sing when the “bawling calf” begins to sound? Can one observe the Supper in any scriptural and meaningful sense as part of the worship of a sectarian group, period?

The latter explanation of what Smith is describing in his preceding statements is even more troubling, if true. It evidences an attitude toward the use of mechanical instruments that is deceptive and dangerous! It says that as long as one **in his mind** does not consider himself to be singing with the instrument, then he is singing **without** the instrument, even though in reality his voice is blending with the others who are singing **with** it! This is a ludicrous view! If this evidences the thinking of one who “is so strongly opposed to musical instruments in worship,” I wonder what our brother would practice if he were not “so strongly opposed” to it? It is reduced to simply a matter of one’s “thinking” or perception. As long as one “thinks” within himself that he is not singing with the instrument, then that is what he is doing, even though he actually is involved in singing with the instrument. The kind of epistemology involved is right out of existentialism. If it is merely a case of mind over matter, then why worry about the instrument at all—or anything else?

He also calls their worship “an otherwise enviable worship ideal.” How is he defining “ideal” here? The model, pattern, and perfect form of New Testament worship is set forth in New Testament teaching, or is Smith contending for a new standard or a new *paradigm* for worship? This might explain how one could sing **with** the instrument while singing **without** it at the same time and in the same context. Logicians would call this a violation of the law of non-contradiction.

Pages 103 and 104 chronicle further participation on the part of Smith in the worship of the “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church” in speaking and leading singing, which he does do **a cappella**. They evidently have accommodated themselves to the angst Smith feels over the use of the instrument in some respects, especially when he

leads their singing. He gives a bit of detail on the nature of the sermons or lessons that he has delivered to them. He says that he spoke on the subject of baptism during an “Any Questions” night and in at least one specific sermon on the topic. He writes:

It would be enough in a book of this scope to use their [the “Ashton believers”] concern for our consciences as an illustration of the attitude all of us ought to have when there are differences in understanding about New Testament teaching.

He then asks, “How many of us are willing to forego a familiar worship pattern for the sake of others’ consciences?” Is LaGard pleading for an open-door policy in which we adapt our worship to suit the *conscience* of every visitor to the worship services of the Lord’s church?

There is a vital point that he is missing—the matter of authority itself! Freedom of conscience relates to those areas that constitute matters of indifference (*opinion*) and not matters of difference (*faith*) wherein God has already legislated! Are we to conclude that the accommodation of practices to the consciences of our neighbors is more vital than truth itself?

He says we need to “honor shared faith” (104). What does this mean? What does this entail? How far are we to go? He says that these people are “like family,” but they are not part of the spiritual family of God! We can, according to Smith, *associate* with them to the point of actively participating in their worship services, but we cannot extend to them “in-Christ” fellowship. Just what does it take to do the former while avoiding the latter?

But even here there is a kicker given by Smith near the bottom of page 104. He writes about a “most perplexing and frustrating” aspect concerning his and his wife’s “association” (his word, HDD) “with the believers at Ashton-under-Hill.” He says, “Never in my own experience has the phrase ‘Christians, but not the only Christians’ so precisely fit as in the case of some of the believers at Ashton.” Smith contends that **some** of these “believers” have “been baptized pursuant to the New Testament pattern, and thus they are well and truly Christians.” If that be the case, then why are they worshipping with a sectarian group? Why has Smith **by his own actions** encouraged continued participation within a sectarian group? Can one be faithful (be “truly Christian”) and yet work and worship as part of a man-

made denomination, regardless of whether or not they have a “formally adopted denominational creed?” What constitutes scriptural baptism? Is being baptized to obey God, even if one does not believe that obedience is essential to salvation, sufficient?

Now brother Smith has some “family” who are part of this group that is “like family” but are not family, and therefore are not part of “in-Christ fellowship!” Are we to conclude that some who are not “in Christ” are now family? Or are we to conclude that there are those who are “in Christ” at Ashton-under-Hill who are “like family but are not family?” Are there Christians that are not “in Christ?” Is it possible for a person to be taught error and believe error, but somehow wind up obeying the truth? Smith adds: “So I find myself among faithful, God-fearing, worshipful believers who have taught me much about the dynamics of worship, and yet their response to Christian birth is mixed at best” (105). But, if they are “faithful, God-fearing, worshipful believers,” as he asserts, then why **have** they not been born again? Can one be this kind of person without having experienced the New Birth? Again, how is Smith defining his terms? He asks, “What fellowship if any do we have with devout believers who have never been biblically baptized?” How does he define the phrase “devout believers?” One cannot be “devout” under the auspices of the Gospel Age without having obeyed the Gospel itself.

Brother Smith maintains that people like those at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church” are “like family, but not family” (105). He has “faith fellowship” with them, though he also terms it “association,” as we have seen. He declares, “Although this fellowship falls short of ‘in Christ’ fellowship, it rises higher than the ‘universal fellowship’ which I have with the family of man, even those who are spiritual seekers” (105-106). He admonishes us to treat zealous religious folk with respect, et al. (106-107), **and this is well and good** because it does not necessitate the establishment and promotion of a fictitious view of fellowship, which ensnares us in a hopeless morass of self-contradictions and absurdities, which undermines the truth about fellowship as taught in the New Testament and the truth itself! While we should never treat people with contempt, it does not follow that we must devise a false view of fellowship.

Smith then seeks to create an example of “faith fellowship” right out of Mark 9:38-41. When one begins to blur the lines of fellowship,

Mark 9:3-41 is the passage he jumps off from. Rubel Shelly did it in his arrival at what he called “Big F” and “little f” fellowship. Note that he taught that there were two levels of it, while Smith has concocted five! A hosts of others mimicking Rubel have promoted other warped views on fellowship, and it seems that one of their main texts to butcher in **every** case has been Mark 9:38-41! Now here goes LaGard on the same text, by writing:

The level of fellowship which I have described as “faith fellowship” finds its scriptural basis in a passage which unfortunately has come to be greatly misused in support of wide-open Christian fellowship with all who trust in Jesus (107).

In the passage John informs Christ that he and the other apostles had forbade a man from casting out a demon in the name of the Lord, “because he followeth not us.” Smith takes the man casting out demons in Mark 9 and makes him a Denominationalist! He says that, though he was not a part of the disciples, he did not “belong to the Lord.” He says that the evidence of this is in the reference to the one who gives a cup of water. He quotes the Lord as saying, “I tell you the truth, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to Christ will certainly not lose his reward.” He then asserts that Jesus was saying that only John and the other apostles belonged to Him, but the one who gives them water does not! The “reward” that he would not lose would be the honoring of his faith by the disciples. Smith admits: There is no “support here for some all-inclusive Christian fellowship based upon nothing more than ‘good works done in the name of the Lord.’” Yet, he argues that “‘the demon chaser’ and the ‘cup giver’ are to be honored for the good deeds which they have done in Christ’s name.” He says that Jesus taught, “They may not be *one of us*, but they are not our enemies. Indeed they may be in jeopardy of eternal condemnation, but they are not against us.” He concludes:

What he [Jesus] is saying is that we have a special kind of fellowship with all those who give honor to Christ in whatever they do. Not Christian fellowship, with all which that entails, but faith fellowship, giving honor to whom honor is due (107-108).

We are to take the words of Christ here as a proclamation on the need to honor Baptist, Roman Catholic, etc., folk for their “faith” in Christ? and for the “good works” they do to “honor” Christ? There

are a few things that are ignored and others which are taken for granted in his exposition.

1. This passage deals with a condition of things that were in vogue **prior** to the death of Christ—the end of the Mosaic economy and beginning of the Christian Age. The law of Moses was still in effect (Heb. 9:15-17; Col.2:14-16; Eph. 1:14-16). There were Jews, under the auspices of that law, who were functioning in various capacities within the framework of **that** Divinely-approved and authorized system (cf., Mat. 10:27). **However, there were no denominational churches in existence at this point in time.** How Smith finds some application to the case of denominations, which have no scriptural right to exist, defies logic! John the Baptizer and his disciples for a time also co-existed side by side within Judaism with the disciples of the Lord, though eventually John's disciples came to follow Christ due in part to the teaching of John (cf., John 1:29ff). The fact that the man who was casting out demons was not **then** among the immediate disciples of Christ did not mean that he **never** would be. Nor does it follow that at the **time** of the text every-one **had** to be among the immediate disciples of Christ, though that condition was changing due to the unfolding of God's plan through Him!

2. The very presence of the miracle involved Divine-approval (cf., John 3:1-2). The one rebuked by the apostles had the sanction of God: For in the act of the miraculous it was God Himself acting through the human agent! This would in turn validate the message of the one performing the miracle. If this man is to represent Methodist preachers, Free Church elders, or Catholic priests, then what would be the implication? Shelly is more consistent in his tomfoolery on the text than Smith is!

3. In both actions, the casting out of the demon and the giving of the cup of water, the acts were done "in the name" of Christ. This means "by the authority of" (cf., Acts 4:7-12; Col. 3:17). What was being done was authorized and approved by Christ! It demonstrates that the works and the individuals who performed them were in compliance with Divine authority in what they did! Now let us see if brother Smith will apply that to the denominations.

4. Though brother Smith tries to apply the reward of verse 41 to the *honor* given by disciples of the Lord in the practice of "faith

fellowship” (an explanation that “begs the question” to say the least, cf., 108), this is not the most natural understanding of the word as used here. It clearly contemplates salvation as contrasted with condemnation in Hell fire (Mark 9:42-48)!

5. Earlier Christ had taught His disciples in the giving of the limited commission, “He that receiveth you receiveth me” (Mat. 10:40-42). And in Matthew 12:30 He taught, “He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad.” What do these verses mean then, in view of Smith’s exegesis? Practically speaking, what is the difference between “Christian” and “faith” fellowship? It appears to me that Smith practices the same things regardless of which is in view!

Brother Smith next turns to 2 Chronicles 6:32-33 to try to find support for his “faith fellowship” doctrine. He uses Solomon’s prayer for “the foreigner who does not belong to your [God’s] people Israel.” He cites this as evidence that we should pray that God’s blessings “would rest upon all those who have turned their hearts and lives toward Christ” (108-109). How Smith leaps in his logic from the case of Gentiles, who (as “strangers at the gate”) believed in Jehovah and acceptably sojourned with Israel, to the case of D. James Kennedy and Pat Robertson is puzzling! Must we lecture our brother on the nature of the different covenants involved, not to mention the fact of Gentile Patriarchy being contemporaneous with the Mosaic Economy? Must we remind him that Gentiles could and did sojourn with Israel with specific approval from God? Can he demonstrate that the same thing can be practiced today under New Testament authority relative to the denominations? Is he willing to accept all of the implications that follow from his suggested parallel? The strangers that sojourned in Israel were granted many rights and privileges. Will Smith be consistent and extend such to the denominations?

His next line of argument (110-112) is to discuss some of the beautiful hymns authored by denominational folk. He notes how our worship and our lives have been enhanced by these song writers and their efforts. He does not clearly declare what this all implies. He asserts that “we may not have true Christian fellowship with these faith-filled hymn writers, but surely we share a common fellowship of faith in the One who died for all” (112). What does he mean by “true Christian fellowship” or “a common fellowship of faith”? How is he

using “Christian” and “fellowship” here—or anywhere else for that matter? The Bible talks about “the like precious faith” that Christians in the full and proper sense of the word share (2 Pet. 1:1), but this cannot be the faith that LaGard has in mind! Because one may utilize material that another has produced, it does not follow from such that the two are in fellowship, as the word is used by inspiration, with one another! Would quoting from a poem by an atheist, pagan, or a deist in an approving way constitute fellowship? Would citing works written by skeptics in opposition to a particular false view, say the **New Age Movement**, demand that the one using that material is in fellowship with the skeptics? Because Paul quoted a paganistic Cretan prophet, did that demand that he was in fellowship with whatever philosophical or religious group with which that poet was associated (Tit. 1:12)? Paul even quoted approvingly from a Greek poet (Acts 17:28) in stressing a point in his sermon on Mars’ Hill. Did that mean that he was in fellowship with whatever philosophical, political, or religious group to which this poet may have belonged?

Brother Smith then addresses what he terms “The Practical Meaning of Faith Fellowship” (112-113). He states that the practical application of this level of fellowship requires us “to acknowledge Christ-centered faith wherever we find it—even in those who may be outside the boundaries of Christian fellowship.” He says, “We must come to accept that it is not wrong to fellowship *as believers* others who wear the name ‘Christian’ but aren’t.” He declares we must “honor their faith, learn from their faith, be rebuked by their faith, be prompted by their faith, read the words of their faith, and sing the feelings of their faith.” He says that “committed believers in groups outside our own Christian fellowship are not to be seen as spiritual lepers.” He adds, “We can benefit from their proclamation and teaching of the Word, whether it be in books, or over the radio, or even in a time of worship within their own buildings.” He reminds us, “Perhaps, we have forgotten that only a couple of generations ago our forebears in the church used to attend whatever ‘gospel meeting’ was in town, whether Baptist, Methodist, or Presbyterian,” and adds that “the denominational folks attended ours.”

Are we to conclude that this authorizes us to participate with the denominations in their worship services, as Smith did at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church?” Brethren have often in times past attended

denominational services during their respective “revivals,” but did this necessarily involve fellowship? I have attended Baptist, Pentecostal, et al., meetings (**Note:** they were not “gospel meetings,” because they do not preach the gospel of Christ!) **when those meetings did not conflict with meeting with the saints of God**, but I did not participate in any fashion that could be taken as approval. I have frequently challenged the speaker to defend his particular creed and dogmas and have questioned them on the spot about some false claim which they made during their lessons. I have also done similarly at meetings conducted by cult groups and skeptics who do not at all profess faith in Christ. Does this involve fellowship? I have listened to lectures delivered by philosophers trying to defend abortion, evolution, etc., and have sought to “take them to task” on such matters. Does this involve fellowship? What would it prove, relative to what the Bible teaches on fellowship, if it were the case that every brother and sister of “a couple of generations ago” attended a Catholic Mass and said 100 “Hail, Mary’s” to boot? Does that establish authority for the practice today? Maybe we could even get by with just taking the “consecrated” wafer for the Lord’s Supper on Saturday night from the hand of the priest and just think **in our minds** that it actually is Sunday and that we also mentally had “the fruit of the vine” along with it!

LaGard proceeds to scold us about our “blind spots” that we need to take note of and avoid. He says, “It has taken a group of believers in a little English chapel to arrest my attention and teach me more perfectly the meaning of worship.” He then asks:

What else do I need to learn, perhaps from Pentecostals, about what it means to give myself over to a more emotional expression of my faith? Or from Quakers, about listening more closely to God through meditative silence? Or from Anglicans, about a greater zeal for doing social justice? Or from the Dutch Calvinists, about thinking more Christianly in all that I do? Or from Catholics, about a greater need for confessing my sins before God? (112-113).

Is LaGard advocating Holy Roller worship services, testimonials, and so on, for us to experiment with to get more “emotional” in our expressions? Is he advocating here the subjective quaking and shaking to “tune in” God in some form of mystical meditation? Does this not also assume that God is speaking to Quakers in some better-felt-than-told way? Does it not presume that there is a message “out there”

beyond the borderland of Holy Scripture for us to pluck out of the ethereal regions? Is Smith advocating the return to the failed efforts of the social gospel that Anglicans, Episcopalians, and Methodists helped to formulate near the close of the 19th Century? Are we to replace the writings of the apostles with the Socialistic theories of Shailer Matthews and Walther Raushenbusch? Is LaGard suggesting that Calvinists, who believe that “whatever will be, will be,” even if it never happens, are our models for “thinking Christianly” (whatever he means by that term)? How can a people, whom he says are not Christians, be the model for Christian conduct or thinking? Remember, it is possible for one to be morally good in a number of ways, and yet not be a Christian. Does moral goodness in some things qualify certain ones to be models in the broad field of “thinking Christianly”? And is Smith desirous of the establishment of the Catholic concepts of the confessional and penance? Or maybe paying money for indulgences would enhance our confessing sins more! Are we to concoct a repetitive verbal formula that by our “much speaking” will serve as a personal talisman to extract forgiveness from a shrouded cleric? Just how far does Smith wish to go in *learning* from them and in aping their liturgies and rituals?

He speculates, “I have often wondered if the various denominations haven’t come into being because they each focus on something that other believers may have missed” (113). What are we to make of this? Has Smith never had a course in church history? Does he not know anything about the rise of false doctrines, philosophies, etc., and the role they have played in the formation of specific religious systems? Is he now suggesting the formation of a syncretistic form of “Christianity,” that, like Hinduism, takes the **perceived** good that each system seems to emphasize and puts them together in one special mix? This “Hamburger Helper” approach to Christianity overlooks the fact that the New Testament has already provided the complete, thorough, and cohesive pattern for everything that “pertain unto life and godliness” (2 Pet. 1:3-4). He bemoans our “majoring in some things while minoring in others,” like university students. He goes on to talk about the “majors” of Christian faith, but adds that we should not consider “any aspect of Christian faith” a “minor.” (But his previous remark about “majoring” and “minoring” implies that he considers at least some things to be “minors,” while others are taken

to be “majors.” Otherwise, his reference to “majoring” and “minoring” is useless gibberish! Is worshipping by singing without the instrument, for example, a “minor” point of doctrine and practice? From his activities at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church” one is led to believe that brother Smith considers it so.) He asserts that we need to finish “the rest of the curriculum,” presumably by participating with the denominations in certain things (113)!

The next section deals with the case of Smith’s “association” with a visiting Catholic professor whom he identifies simply as “Doug.” He attempts to use the example of the mutual respect for the personal faith they each have to illustrate the importance of “faith fellowship.” LaGard states that he has less in common in the depth of his faith with his colleagues who are members in the churches of Christ than with Catholic Doug. If he has reference to colleagues at Pepperdine and some of *our* other so-called “Christian” schools, then I am not surprised! There are such beings in the universe called **apostates**. There are those who have shipwrecked their faith and that of others. The effect of evolutionary heresies, post-modern philosophy, and liberal theology, have taken their toll on the universities that once professed belief and defense of the truth “as it is in Christ.” It does not surprise me that a Catholic could demonstrate greater faith than many of “our” university professors and presidents!

He observes, “Sometimes choosing those with whom we most want to associate can end up crossing arbitrary lines of fellowship” (114). What is meant by the word “arbitrary”? And what lines are “arbitrary”? Is the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship a matter that involves an “arbitrary” line? What about hand clapping, drama presentations, etc., as worship; are these matters that involve only an “arbitrary” line of fellowship? What about the use of women to lead prayer, preach, et al.? As per Catholicism and Catholic Doug, what about the burning of incense, the Catholic practice of the Eucharist, extreme unction, priestly absolution, purgatory, prayer to saints, the “adoration” of Mary, the primacy of the pope, et al.?

Brother Smith expresses his credo for his “associations” in this way:

If possible, give me a friend and brother who is all of the above:
justified, saved, committed, and spiritually devoted to his Savior. If

not possible, then give me a believing friend whose faith is on fire, rather than a brother who is justified, but not electrified (114-115).

He adds, “Suffice it to say, faith fellowship will never be a substitute for genuine ‘in Christ’ fellowship. There is an eternity of difference between the two.” However, it seems that this is **exactly** what has happened to Smith on the matter of fellowship. He has **substituted** his notion of “faith fellowship” for the kind of fellowship the Bible teaches, because of the lack of a spiritually-satisfying relationship in the fellowship he has tried to experience with colleagues who are supposed to be “in Christ”! The emotional, spiritual, and rational support that comes from scriptural fellowship cannot be had where the authority of the Scriptures is not truly respected! The answer to his longing for fulfilling fellowship is not at Pepperdine, nor is it in a small denominational chapel in England, nor is it in a Catholic cathedral in California!

Chapter Seven—“In Christ” Fellowship: The Extended Family

Brother Smith discusses what he terms “in-Christ fellowship.” He brings up the example of a group of Messianic Jews with whom he and his wife worshipped when he was making “final preparation for a book on Israel.” They met with these Messianic Jews for worship on the Sabbath (Saturday) after the typical Jewish fashion for synagogue worship, and then they met with them next day, which was the first day of the week (Sunday), to partake of the Lord’s Supper. He describes their Lord’s day worship as consisting of:

the chanting of the Hebrew Torah; the singing of the psalms, accompanied not with instruments but often with vigorous clapping; the openness to discussion (even debate) following the sermon; and the informal passing of the matza (unleavened bread) and wine during the Lord’s supper.

The Smiths also celebrated Passover with them. He says that

we joined in the traditional ceremonies associated with the seder—celebrated differently by these baptized believers only in their recognition that Jesus was the lamb who was slain for the sins of the world (117-118).

From all of this we are to gather that these Messianic Jews are part of “in Christ” fellowship. Yet there is very little difference between these folk and those at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church,” who Smith says were part of “faith fellowship” but not “in Christ” fellowship!

The only differences really have to do with their regular observance of the Lord's Supper and the practice of baptism, which, I take it, was for the remission of sins.

There is as much authority in the New Testament for hand clapping as there is for mechanical instruments in worship. But that should not create any problem for one who can sing without the instrument in his mind while singing with it with his voice. He can simply pretend that he is not clapping with them in his mind while his hands are clapping right along anyway.

I have had some contact with Messianic Jews in the continental United States. I have talked with them and corresponded with some of them about what they believe and teach. They are light-years away from the truth on the covenants and the entire nature of the New Testament church! To these folk one becomes a Jew first and then a Christian! This is nothing but a resurrection of the old Judaizing heresy that troubled the church in the First Century! It is totally at odds with much of New Testament doctrine. The ones with whom I have had contact believe and teach that denominationalism is just fine, as long as the denomination acknowledges the superior authority of the Torah and pays "lip service" to the state of national Israel (especially premillennialism) in their teaching! It also appears to me that there is no difference at all between LaGard's "faith fellowship" and "in Christ fellowship" on this matter, except in the nomenclature concerning each and in the mind of Smith himself. He worshipped with the "Ashton-under-Hill Free Church" in all of their forms, and he did the same with the Messianic Jews in Israel! The former he calls "believers" but not Christians, and the latter he specifically calls them "Jewish Christians" and "baptized believers."

Brother Smith asks at the bottom of page 118, "Could these Torah-chanting, yarmulke-wearing, Passover-observing Jews really be my brothers and sisters in Christ?" He then goes on to answer in the affirmative by citing Romans 15:7-9 and several verses out of Ephesians (118-119). Under the heading "Fellowship Is God's Decision" on page 120, he writes:

What we tend to forget is that it is God, not we, who determines the boundaries of "in Christ" fellowship. Neither "in Christ" fellowship nor "in Christ" unity is something we ourselves can define, limit, regulate, since being "in Christ" involves the forgiveness of sins and reconciliation with God.

It is amazing that Paul did not think of that, otherwise he would have never penned 1 Corinthians 5, Romans 16:15-17, or 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14! He could have just left out the entire first and third chapters of his epistle to Titus, and large portions of his inspired advice and admonitions to Timothy in both epistles! The apostle John should not have written 1 John 1:1-9 at all, and especially not written 2 John 9-11! God **has** defined, limited, and regulated fellowship and unity. He has also given full information on the same to men through the New Testament. It establishes the boundaries, limits, and ground rules governing fellowship. It also requires of those in fellowship with God to abide by these boundaries, limits, and ground rules, or else that fellowship shall be severed! If Smith wishes to include more within the scope of his fellowship, it does not follow that we are obligated to do the same because he “feels,” or “in his mind” he thinks these folks are faithful New Testament Christians.

It is clear from these pages that the determining factor in brother Smith’s mind on whether one is a proper object for extending “in Christ” fellowship is baptism, as “a watershed act of obedience” (118). Thus he asks:

Are there any biblically-baptized believers that you would be ashamed to call your brothers? How about the leaders of the Boston movement? Or those who worship in congregations of the Disciples of Christ or the Christian Church? (119).

He states:

One of the most difficult challenges of “in Christ” fellowship is embracing the fact that the bright line between Christians and non-Christians is both *inclusive* and *exclusive*. It’s a line of demarcation: no unbaptized believer is a Christian; no biblically-baptized believer is *not* a Christian (122).

He says on page 123 that “being a biblically-baptized believer is a watershed line of fellowship.” Just how far will he go with this? What does he mean by “biblically-baptized”? Is immersion alone sufficient? What must the candidate know or what must be his understanding of baptism for it to be valid—immersion “for the remission of sins” or simply immersion to obey God? He suggested earlier that there are those who, in the interest of numerical growth, are trying to add people to the church contrary to God’s Word. He said that such growth is not like that of Pentecost. What must one believe prior to the act, concerning Christ, et al., in order to make it valid? Most of the

leaders of the Boston Movement are apostate members of the Lord's church, but those whom they have taught and persuaded to accept false doctrine relative to salvation, etc., most assuredly could not be. The same principle applies to the Disciples of Christ and the Christian Church. One cannot be taught false doctrine, believe that doctrine, and obey that doctrine, but some how wind up **accidentally obeying the truth!** One may obey the truth, then apostatize by going into a denomination or sect. He is an erring brother. Or it is conceivable, though it would be very difficult, that one may come to obey the truth through his own studies of the Word of God, despite the teaching of his particular denomination or sect. He would then be obligated by that self-same Word to leave that "plant, which [the] heavenly Father hath not planted" (Mat. 15:9, 13; 2 Cor. 6:14-18). **He could not remain within that denomination or sect and be saved.**

He is obligated to worship with the saints of God (Heb. 11:25; Acts 20:7-11; et al.). He could not meet this obligation, as well as others, while in a denomination or sect! Also, it is not a matter of "being ashamed" of these people of whom he writes, it is a matter of whether or not they fit the biblical definition of a faithful child of God or Christian! Smith needs to know that he has no right to try to expand the borders of the kingdom beyond the bounds that God has set, nor to expand the bounds of fellowship beyond the limits set by the Word of God! Another problem with LaGard's view that **the bright line of baptism** is what makes "in Christ" fellowship distinct from "faith fellowship" is the fact that in **practical application** he makes no distinction in his activities and conduct between the unbaptized-believer and the "biblically-baptized believer."

He then rambles about how "a brother is a brother" whether we "like it or not," and we are going to have to put up with the "black sheep" in our midst. He does not tell us what that specifically means relative to fellowship. But then Smith tries to get around the problem posed by Paul's dealings with Hymenaeus, Philetus, and Alexander (1 Tim. 1:20; 2 Tim. 2:17) and John's references to those whom he calls "anti-christs" (1 John 2:18). He takes the position that these men were not "black sheep" but "goats," viz. they were not wayward children of God but were not really ever saved (124-125). He writes of them: "But such 'goats' among the flock are rare indeed—these 'brothers' are only *faux brothers*." He says that they are "not just

prodigal sons, but illegitimate by their own feigning perversity.” He asks, “How could a person be a *Christian* when he has denied the most rudimentary teachings about *Christ*, whose name he presumes to wear?” (125). Smith thus does Ben Bogard and D. N. Jackson proud on these passages! He has now resorted to the Baptist quibble that these men really were never saved to start with. He concludes that fellowship was never extended to them; thus they did not have to be withdrawn from by others.

The Baptists try to use this ploy to *prove* the notion of “once saved, always saved,” but our brother Smith employs it to throw out church discipline! Never mind that Paul says of Hymanaeus and Alexander that he had “delivered” them “unto Satan,” an expression used of the congregational action of withdrawal of fellowship to be taken at Corinth against the fornicator of 1 Corinthians 5! Never mind that he says that these men were “of” those who had “put away” faith and a good conscience, thus implying that they once stood in these matters where Timothy now stands (1 Tim. 1:18-19). Never mind that John says of the anti-christs about whom he writes that “they went out from us, but they were not of us” (1 John 2:19). Are we to conclude, a la Bogard and company, that what John really was saying is that they were really **never** of us? Is it not at all possible that these individuals at one time did believe the truth of the Incarnation but later adopted ideas that implicitly or explicitly repudiated it? We have some brethren who have done the same, in effect, today! Smith’s desire for a broader fellowship is compelling him to take positions that imply absurd, unscriptural, and destructive conclusions. Any doctrine that implies a false doctrine must necessarily be false!

Brother Smith acknowledges (125-126) that he at times has been using differing definitions of the words “believers” and “Christians.” He states that this can be confusing. But whose fault is it, if there is confusion from context to context?

He turns his attention to the baptism of “certain disciples” in Acts 19:1-7 (127). He tries to find a “close parallel” between the condition of those men in Acts 19 and the Baptists today. He admits that:

Clearly their [the Baptists’] form of conversion (getting the cart of salvation before the horse of immersion) is not consistent with the pattern of apostolic baptism. In the New Testament there is not one case where salvation preceded baptism.

He proceeds to argue that there “is an important distinction to be made between one’s act and one’s understanding”; thus all one has to know in order to be scripturally baptized may be (he calls it a “possibility”) to know that he is obeying God in the act. He says:

What it suggests is the possibility that—despite their misunderstanding of baptism’s purpose—believers who are immersed in order to obey the command to be baptized might nevertheless be regarded in God’s eyes as saved believers. As Christians.

He then adds, “If so, of course, they would not have been saved at the point of faith (as they, themselves, think), but only at the point of their baptism—an odd situation to say the least” (128).

He raises two questions to ponder. First, “Must a person have a completely correct understanding of the doctrine of baptism in order for his adult, faith-prompted immersion in the name of Jesus to ‘count’?” Second, he asks, “Does God penalize false starts?” He contends that the Bible gives no clear answer to the former question. He says, “We’re simply not told.” As to the latter, he asks a convoluted question by way of analogy with marriage: “Would the fact that they [the parties in the marriage] had been wrong to live together outside marriage invalidate a subsequent wedding ceremony?” (128).

In response to the first question and the basic point that he has raised which prompted it, will brother Smith apply this distinction between the act and one’s understanding to the matter of the mode or form of baptism, or to the element to be used in baptism, or even the prerequisites to baptism (e.g., faith)? Why stop with the Baptists? Is the reason that some may be inclined to consider this a “safe” position, as he warned earlier with reference to the open-fellowship movement? Does he not wind up “meeting himself” while going here? Martin Luther and his immediate followers taught that baptism was necessary to obtain the forgiveness of sins, but they also taught sprinkling as a scriptural mode and practiced the sprinkling of infants. They argued that these children would be brought up to believe on the Lord, thus their prior baptism would count toward their forgiveness at that time! **What is the difference between these early Lutherans and the position of brother Smith?**

As to the second question and its corollary concerning marriage, Smith’s analogy must pre-suppose that Christ, the Bridegroom here, has been “shacking up” with the Baptists prior to the actual marriage!

Two parties are needed for the arrangement. Now will he take that idea any farther? He feels the force of the possible implications when he states that there is nothing “immoral” about the spiritual arrangement, while there would be in the physical relationship. But is Christ guilty of “spiritual adultery” (Jam. 4:4)? LaGard then draws what he calls a “closer analogy” at the bottom of page 128. It is the case of “a man and woman who incorrectly believe that they are married as common law husband and wife.” He then says:

If subsequently they should desire to formalize their assumed marriage as a demonstration of their love and commitment to each other, the wedding ceremony would actually legitimize a relationship which they thought they already had but didn't.

In the analogy **both** parties have the same mis-understanding about their relationship. Does Smith really want to pursue this line of thought? He admits (129), “What makes such an hypothesis so awkward is that there is no express biblical warrant for guaranteeing salvation on the basis of such ‘time-delayed’ baptisms.” He later writes:

Having written so strongly in earlier chapters about the error of “faith-only” salvation, it certainly gives me no comfort to now suggest that such error might nevertheless be overcome at the point of baptism. But I see no brighter line to follow.

He adds, “Given a type of baptism which is unbiblical in understanding, yet biblical in obedience, we are caught on the horns of a dilemma in a grey area between ‘faith fellowship’ and ‘in Christ’ fellowship” (129). There you have it! The line of fellowship between these two “levels,” which he has envisioned, has now become so blurred that the two have, in the case of the Baptists at least, become one! The entire Baptist Church has just slid into “in Christ” fellowship. However, such has been the case from the outset, and his concept of fellowship also implicitly encompasses the idea of “common cause” associations as well, despite his attempt to distinguish between them! The dilemma is one of his own making. Rather than rejecting the false and assumed premise, concerning what one must know in order for one's baptism to be valid, he is inexorably led to his false conclusions on both Baptist baptism and fellowship. Ultimately, this position can only lead to the “open fellowship” with all denominations that he professes to deplore; he winds up in the camp of Max Lucado, Mike Cope, and Rubel Shelly. It will just take him a little

longer to “arrive.” This chapter directly contradicts his material answering Mike Cope (chapter 2), and it mocks and ridicules his own plea to Max Lucado in an open letter reproduced in the *Epilogue* of this same book.

He writes on page 130: “It would be simpler, of course, just to say what we have usually said all along: that unless a person has been baptized *for the right reason*, he is not a Christian.” What is wrong with that? He answers:

I can only say that such a position is a tougher brief to argue than we’ve ever before admitted. Worse yet, if we’ve been wrong about it, then we have wrongly withheld fellowship from those with whom God himself is in fellowship.

These two objections reveal the bankruptcy of brother Smith’s entire system. First, if “A” implies a false doctrine, then “A” must necessarily be false. If the consequent is false, then its antecedent must also be false. It may be a “tougher brief to argue,” given the assumptions and flawed thinking of LaGard on fellowship, but is it an **impossible** brief to argue and prove with the truth unhampered by such nonsense? Read the debates of N. B. Hardeman, Guy N. Woods, W. Curtis Porter, and Thomas B. Warren with Baptist preachers, and see if they did so!

Second, the transverse to Smith’s concerns over whom we may have left out of our fellowship ought to be concern over the danger of knowingly **extending fellowship to those with whom God is not in fellowship!** He frets that there may arise from mistakes made “in this shadowy area” the promotion of “a clearly unbiblical view of baptism” (130). How much more unbiblical than Baptist baptism can be tolerated for fellowship to be maintained? What about Methodist “sprinkling”? He urges further study and dialogue on the matter, and admonishes us to not “squint and make well-intentioned attempts to force” fuzzy lines on the matter of fellowship “into a scriptural focus.” He says that we must “get out a biblical brush and paint them bright again” (131). Brethren, did not the Holy Spirit in revealing the Word of God do a good enough job of painting the lines in the Word of God? Why are these lines “fuzzy” to brother Smith? We need to be careful that our eyesight in viewing the lines is not influenced by what we would have the Bible to teach on fellowship and sundry matters, because of our own backgrounds.

Brother Smith surprisingly refutes the abuse of the “other sheep” passage of John 10:1-16 by certain who try to justify fellowshipping virtually everyone (131). He warns against jumping “to the conclusion that Jesus was referring here to all those with whom we have faith fellowship.” He says that the “other sheep” were all part of the “one flock.” He states, “Certainly there is nothing in Jesus’ words to support today’s well-intended, but misguided, efforts at achieving Christian fellowship with those who are not yet fellow Christians.” However, he still maintains the idea of some sort of “faith fellowship” with all professing faith in Christ.

He next turns his attention to the use of the Greek word *koinonia* as it relates to the fellowship of Christians with one another. The practice of benevolence, the sharing of goods based upon the needs of brethren, and such like, are stressed (131-134). But then he switches gears under the heading “From Caring to Conscience.” He suggests that there can be “multiple fellowships of conscience within the extended family of God.”

Chapter Eight—Conscience Fellowship: Close Family

Beginning this chapter brother Smith brings up the one-cup question. He points out how he has worshipped with brethren who insist on one container for the fruit of the vine (137-138). He says, “Although we differ in our understanding regarding this matter of doctrine, it does not violate my conscience to drink from a single container” (138). He also notes how some European Christians use “wine.” He has joined with them in such observance with “no challenge” to his conscience, but acknowledges that there are some brethren “who would be uncomfortable in conscience were they to drink wine at the Lord’s table” (138).

Smith presents what he calls “A Laundry List of Doctrinal Differences.” He begins with the one container versus many containers issue, and states, “Unlike preferences regarding worship style, doctrinal differences very often involve matters of conscience, particularly when those differences affect the time of ‘gathered’ worship.” He does not tell us what he means by “worship style,” which in many circles has become a code word for doing just about anything one wishes to do and call it “worship!” *In Search of Wonder*, by Anderson, Shelly, Lucado, and friends, gives evidence of this very point. LaGard brings up the war question and other matters pertaining to the

role of the Christian within the framework of civil government. He refers to the controversy over the length of the days of Genesis 1 whether they are literal or stood for long eons of time, and he refers to the question of whether the flood of Genesis 6-8 “was local or global.”

He also remarks about the debate raging over the eschatological import of the Book of Revelation between premillennialists, postmillennialists, and amillennialists. The specific nature of Heaven and Hell, including whether the eternal punishment of Hell will be “continuous, conscious burning,” et al., and the question of where the righteous go at death, are introduced. He then writes, “All of these questions about the past and future raise yet further questions pertaining to our present fellowship.” He then queries, “Does the fact that we might disagree on any of these questions mean that one or another of us has forfeited ‘in Christ’ fellowship, or even *koinonia* fellowship?” He adds parenthetically, “Suppose we disagree on the answer to that very question itself—the one about forfeited fellowship!” (140). If the purpose is to suggest that matters pertaining to “the past and future” are “disputable” matters, brother Smith should remember that the redemptive act of the death of Christ and the Resurrection were matters that occurred in the past “in time and space.” He should also be apprised that the Lord taught that God made man “in the beginning,” both male and female (Mat. 19), and placed His own stamp of approval on the universal nature of the flood (Luke 17; Mat. 24; 2 Pet. 3). If these are “disputable” matters, then is the integrity of Christ also disputable? Is premillennialism, which implicitly militates against the role of the gospel and the church of Christ in “the eternal purpose” of God, a matter where fellowship cannot be sundered?

LaGard introduces in the next section doctrines like “Calvinism’s predestination, or original sin, or the impossibility of apostasy.” He asks, “Could ‘in Christ’ fellowship embrace biblically-baptized believers who happen to believe any of those classic doctrines?” He declares:

If in the process of becoming a Christian a person is not required to make a creedal confession about predestination, original sin, or the impossibility of apostasy, how can “in Christ” fellowship possibly be put in jeopardy by error about such issues?

He adds parenthetically that he is using these things “simply to establish the principle that even significant doctrinal differences do not automatically disenfranchise a person from body fellowship.” One wonders if Smith is not content to stop at the condition of the understanding of a new convert or one seeking conversion on such matters, but searches for a wedge to pry upon the doors of fellowship a bit wider! (1) Is the Calvinistic doctrine of predestination consistent with a **free will** submission to baptism for the remission of sins? (I am a former Calvinist, and I readily saw the self-contradiction that existed between my Calvinism and the need to obey the gospel of Christ. The two concepts are mutually exclusive!) (2) Is belief in the dogma of “original sin” (or Total Depravity) consistent with what the Bible teaches sin is? Must not one have some sort of just understanding about the fact and nature of sin, even prior to repentance? (3) How can one consistently hold to the idea of “the impossibility of apostasy,” which is based upon the presumption that one could do nothing toward his own salvation and therefore can do nothing to lose it, and yet properly, knowingly **obey** the gospel of Christ **by doing some things toward his own salvation**? Belief in this doctrine precludes the possibility of genuine obedience, as indeed do the other two “significant doctrinal “ errors. One cannot believe false doctrine that impinges upon salvation itself and, believing that, **obey the truth by accident!** One may inconsistently be dipped into the water, but that no more makes him a child of God than “sitting in a hen-house” would make one a rooster! If one does manage to get dipped while believing these things, then he needs to be better taught, and ultimately baptized right **after he gives up these errors**. But Smith teaches that the only grounds for exclusion from “in Christ” fellowship is “a subsequent denial of the very heart of the gospel—Christ’s nature and mission” (141). However, Calvinists and many other denominationalists do not reject the Incarnation and the mission of Christ to save the world, but they do reject the essentiality of baptism for man’s salvation, which brother Smith elsewhere calls “the line of demarcation” and “the bright line” marking “in Christ fellowship.”

On page 141 he defines “conscience fellowship” as “**fellowship within fellowship**.” He says that there are doctrinal differences which “of necessity will separate brothers and sisters whose consciences are

violated by those teachings.” This creates sub-levels of fellowship within the “in Christ” fellowship.

He does not see the difference between issues or doctrines that concern human origins and destiny (as well as those that deal with what he calls “compelling points of doctrine”) and the question of whether an evangelist can serve as an elder as well, et al. He blends matters of difference (faith) with matters of indifference (opinion) without bothering to take up each and discuss what is really involved in them—particularly the nature of their implicit consequences.

He also attempts to make distinctions between those issues that “directly affect us only as individual Christians” and those which “affect us corporately as a body of believers.” Does it make a difference as to whether one believes Darwinism or a doctrine that is designed to accommodate Darwinian assumptions? The historical accuracy of Scripture does have value and impact upon the souls of men. It does make a difference whether one believes in the free moral agency of man. It will impact in a **meaningful** way how he responds or whether he **believes** he can respond to God’s revelation in the Bible. It makes a difference if one accepts a view of hell that, instead of discouraging him from sinning, removes the fear of the horror of “neverending, conscious” torment. Is not the doctrine of Hell intended to be a “selling point” for one to obey the gospel of Christ and be faithful (Mat. 10:28)? Will not what is taught and believed about Hell impact lives in a **meaningful** way? Are doctrines that may affect us more as *individuals* of less importance than those which affect us *corporately*, or vice versa? Smith lists the split over the instrument and over the Missionary Society as examples where the whole church was affected. But we have already observed how Smith handled the instrument matter at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church.” His conduct does not inspire confidence in his current theories.

The bottom-line of this chapter is to try to establish a basis for not only the existence of splinter groups within the general brotherhood, but also the inevitability of such groups. He maintains that there can be spiritual “enclaves of conscience” within the brotherhood over doctrinal matters. These constitute “close family.” He writes:

If there are to be enclaves of conscience fellowship, the broader boundaries of “in Christ” fellowship must be acknowledged at all times. Freedom to interact more intimately with those who are “close

family” does not mean that we can deny, denigrate, or even ignore the wider extended family (143).

But it is interesting that he draws the line at immoral activities, such as homosexuality and other forms of sexual misconduct. He says that “there are some doctrines too obviously ungodly to others’ conscientious understanding,” and cites the case of the Jerusalem council’s decisions of Acts 15 in support of this point (143-144)! Certain other doctrines impact the moral conduct of people. What about the notion that we are not under law at all? Or the doctrine of the impossibility of apostasy, which Smith referred to earlier? Or what about the naturalism of Darwinian evolution or some “baptized” version of it in the form of theistic evolution? He asserts that there **are** sins which “cannot simply be a matter of individual or congregational conscience” (144). Who decides which ones fit into this category and which ones do not? Does not the position of “spiritual enclaves” involve a self-contradiction in that it argues: (1) fellowship can never be withdrawn over these issues, and (2) fellowship can yet not rightfully exist between two **differing** “enclaves” over these issues?

Brother Smith butchers Romans 14 and 15 (144-147) with the same meat-clever approach the liberals have used to justify open fellowship. He seeks to apply the text to “disputable matters,” though he does not give compelling criteria for determining which is and which is not a *disputable* matter. Perhaps, it has to do with just how doggedly one wishes to hold to a particular notion, regardless of how absurd and even dangerous it may be! He evidently rejects the idea that Paul is writing about matters of indifference, i.e., matters wherein there is no inherent sin if one does or does not do them, unless one violates his conscience in so doing. Smith applies it to doctrinal differences, et al. (145). He, realizing some of the problems raised by his position, makes an interesting comment on page 146: “Does Romans 14 teach that either individuals or congregations are to tolerate sin in the name of Christian fellowship?” He answers emphatically, “Certainly not.” He then elucidates:

The danger here, of course, is that one person can confuse sin (e.g. adultery) with doctrinal differences (e.g. whether a particular remarriage constitutes adultery). This can lead, in turn, to accusing others of tolerating adultery without acknowledging that, if the other person is right about the marriage not being adulterous, then there is no sin at all being tolerated.

But surely, if a doctrine regarding remarriage implies or encourages a condition wherein one will be guilty of adultery, then it is as wrong to teach it as to practice it! Brother Smith's position argues for a view of morality that is quite selective in its nature.

The New Testament authorizes divorce and remarriage only on one particular ground (Mat. 19:9), but Smith calls this a "disputable matter," because it involves a "frustrating doctrinal standoff." Hear him:

I appreciate that those who believe the remarriage to be adulterous will insist that it cannot be other than adultery, but it just brings us back to a frustrating doctrinal stand-off—one of the very "disputable matters" about which Paul was writing.

He adds immediately, "You can be sure that those who conscientiously refused to eat meat believed that those who did eat meat were doing so in violation of God's law. To them, eating meat was not a matter of scruples but sin." Then he concludes, "That is precisely why it is a matter of conscience." He asserts that Paul was not discussing matters of indifference (opinion) in Romans 14.

Now, brethren, catch the implication of this! The brethren who believe certain marriages to involve adultery are like the ones who refused to eat meat. They are the weak brethren, according to Smith's argument. The brethren who do not believe as they do, but who teach that there is more than two grounds for remarriage (i.e., following the death of a spouse or divorce from a spouse on the grounds of fornication) are like the ones who could eat meat and not violate their conscience. They are the strong brethren. If this is not the intent of what he is saying, then he needs to make that intent clear!

If one wishes to have his particular doctrine to be considered "out of bounds" for anyone to attack it strenuously, then just become intransigent on the matter to such an extent that you create a "doctrinal stand-off." Given the most common argument for the position that non-Christians are not amenable to the law of Christ on marriage, then how can we successfully stop the influx of those practicing homosexuality or successfully oppose those who advocate homosexual marriages? The battle field will have been surrendered to that perversion the same day that the Bales and Hailey (and their many variations and spinoffs, a la Jim Woodroof, Olan Hicks, and Dan

Billingsly) heresies on divorce and remarriage are no longer opposed! Is this the kind of “elbow-room” (147) that Smith envisions?

He addresses the subject of “Contending for the Faith” (147-148). He states, “This appeal for honoring the consciences of others is not a call for a moratorium on doctrinal purity or ecclesiastical debate.” He stresses that we must still contend for the faith “regarding the person of Christ and his body, the church.” He adds:

Honoring the conscience of others does not mean that all doctrinal understandings are of equal merit. Nor does it mean that doctrinal error on the part of a baptized believer can never preclude eternal fellowship with God. Nor (for that very reason) that we should never challenge each other over doctrinal issues.

But he does not tell us just how we are to decide when an issue is of greater “merit” than another. Is he to be the arbiter of these matters? Are we to submit to the “testimony” of the so-called “scholars,” such as Carroll Osburn or Thomas Olbricht, to enlighten us?

He says, “Anyone who thinks that after a person is biblically baptized virtually every other doctrinal issue is petty has missed the point.” It is evident from this that he does not accept **fully** the Ketcherside notion that doctrine is not essential to unity. However, what he grants with his left hand he has a propensity to take back with his right. For example:

I honor the consciences of those who use instruments to accompany singing, but I believe that they are wrong to do so, and I will take every opportunity to convince them that temple music was part of a package of temple worship practices done away with under Christ.

His method of “honoring” the conscience of those at “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church,” concerning the instruments they employed, was to sing along with them. Smith just “consoled” himself with the thought that he was actually singing **without** them! Where I come from, we call that *pretending*! Pretending is **outside** of and **contrary** to reality.

He also says that he “honors the conscience” of those who wish to appoint women as elders and deacons and give them “the freedom to teach men in public settings.” Now suppose one’s conscience opted for animal sacrifices or even human sacrifices, would Smith “honor” the consciences of such folk and participate **with** them while **not** participating with them? Or suppose one’s conscience told him that homosexuality was good and wholesome as a religious act? He has

passionately opposed homosexuality, but will he “honor” the consciences of the feminists and pro-feminists among us!

He holds that: “Conscience fellowship doesn’t muzzle doctrinal discussion; conscience fellowship shapes its form and makes it clear that, in the end, God is the One who will decide who is right.” He says:

Conscience fellowship never says, “How we worship and practice is of no ultimate consequence.” It only says, “We must each be free to worship and practice conscientiously before the One who will bring every thought, deed, *and doctrine* into account.”

The key problem here is the fact that God **has already decided who is right!** He decided that when He revealed through His Word **what is right** (John 12:48; 1 Pet. 4:11)! The Judgment will be according to *righteousness* (Acts 17:30-31), and that is revealed in God’s Word (cf., Psa. 119). John says, “He that doeth righteousness is righteous” (1 John 3:7). There is a knowable standard of conduct (John 8:32).

From the tone of brother Smith’s remarks about the Judgment and the certitude of things it appears he believes that, because we may not—or cannot—know everything about everything, then there is the possibility that we may not be right about anything. We just must wait till the Judgment day to “find out” who really was right all along, or even how close they were to being right on things! God will just have to sort everything out then. This view is raw agnosticism, which often among theologians and religious teachers is a by-product of the influence of existential philosophy. If this is the view of Smith, it would explain much concerning the inconsistencies and self-contradictions in doctrine and conduct on his behalf. Also, if this is his view, then how can he with any certitude know that the view is correct? And why should we consider submitting ourselves to a rule of such “conscience fellowship” that we cannot even be certain is right?

Given this view, how could one even be **certain** that homosexuality is a “too obviously ungodly” practice or doctrine to countenance? The idea implies that no belief or practice, regardless of how logically absurd or morally abhorrent, can be reasonably excluded in “conscience fellowship,” despite his protests to the contrary. The consciences of men must be trained and governed by the Word of God, so they can have a “good conscience toward God” (Psa. 19:7-10; 2 Tim.

2:15; cf., 1 Pet. 3:20, 21). Conscience alone is not acceptable as the ruling principle of life. In religion and morality it comes down to this: Does one have scriptural authority for what he believes and practices? Freedom of conscience relates to the exercise of things within **that** framework. As brother H. A. (Buster) Dobbs has said, “One may live *beneath* his privileges, if he so chooses, but one never has the right to live *above* his privileges in the sight of God!”

In “Parting Company Peaceably as brothers,” Smith, takes several passages out of context to apply to his self-created theory of “conscience fellowship.” He makes an appeal for us “to blow the trumpet,” like Joab in 2 Samuel 2, “and stop our ungodly infighting” (148-149). He wants us to be at peace with one another despite our doctrinal “diversity.” He says, “It is not diversity within the family of God that breaks fellowship—only our attitude toward that diversity.” Thus, we must have some form of **unity in diversity**. This is the logical end of his entire book!

It is significant that Smith does not refer to any of the verses or historical examples from the Scriptures that deal with warfare among God’s people which God Himself commanded for the sake of truth and righteousness! Jehoiada, for example, did not have LaGard to advise him on the matter of Athaliah in 2 Chronicles 23. Smith was not on hand to keep Phinehas from spearing the fornicators in Numbers 25. The action of Phinehas stopped a plague on the people because of the sin in the camp of Israel. Brother Smith would surely have had to side against Joshua in the matter concerning Achan as well (Jos. 7). Militancy for the truth has always been a hallmark of God-fearing people. Does every party necessarily sin when division occurs among God’s people (1 Cor. 11:18-19)? How often have liberals among us warned against “biting and devouring one another” as they gobbled up another sheep? There are wolves out there (Mat. 7:15-20; Acts 20:28-31)!

LaGard continues his discussion of “conscience fellowship” with a brief examination of the difference in hermeneutics **first** between the church of Christ and the Christian Church (149-150). It struck him, while in a discussion with Christian Church preachers in the northwest, that they took the idea of the silence of the Scriptures as **liberty** to use the instrument in worship. That this is the Christian Church view of things is indeed amazing, but what is more amazing is

that Smith was unaware of this **prior** to that discussion! The discussion centered around matters covered in his book *The Cultural Church*. This dates the discussion sometime after 1992! That F. LaGard Smith, a professor who has written a number of books examining matters that require some knowledge of hermeneutics, did not know of this **fundamental** difference between the church of Christ and the Christian Church (or denominationalism) before that discussion is simply astounding!

Pointing out that he came from a “non-institutional” background, he then discusses briefly the conflict over orphan homes. He states, “The fight was really about the principle of congregational autonomy—a fight which the ‘non-institutional’ brothers were warranted in waging.” He misses the boat here on the anti-orphan home split as well. The issue **never** has been over congregational autonomy. That has been a *red herring* since day one of the dispute. For a professor, claiming to have come from that background but evidently is no longer part of it, to try to perpetuate this misrepresentation of the central issue is equally amazing! He asks, “Had they [‘non-institutional’ brethren] not raised a hue and cry, who knows what organizational superstructure might now exist among the churches of Christ?” He stresses that the fight over these matters ought to have been “a victory for conscience fellowship,” but it has “turned out to be a colossal defeat in terms of our attitude towards those on the other side of the doctrinal fence.” He adds that this is because “both sides were guilty of animosity.” He appears, while disparaging the lack of “mutual love and respect” by the parties involved, still to be praising the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan home brethren for pressing these issues! For one who decries (149) the “infighting” going on today, but then to side with the factions which brought bitter disharmony and division in the 1950s and 1960s as these “anti” brethren did, is incongruous and self-contradictory!

It is amazing how former members of these factions slide from that position into the liberal or post-modern stances they now defend without so much as an acknowledgment that they were wrong when they were once a part of these factions! Harold Hazelip, Carl Ketcherside, Leroy Garrett, Charles Holt, and numerous others were once leaders of the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan home movement—now where have they gone? Smith is numbered among them. He

worries about what kind of “superstructure” might have otherwise been erected over the churches concerning the orphan home (which is precisely that, a home!). Yet he goes and speaks at the Nashville Jubilee, which proposes to exercise some measure of authority in the training of churches, as though there is no organizational problem at all! Even if he refuses to support it from now on, he still hobnobs regularly with some of the chief architects and proponents of the Jubilee’s existence and influence!

He warns against the “party spirit” which was prevalent at Corinth (1 Cor. 1), but it seems that he fails to recognize his own involvement in such evil through his practice of “faith fellowship,” “conscience fellowship,” and even his “common cause” associations with sectarian and denominational groups! He decries **division** and **warfare** among brethren over doctrine (154-158), but he has sided in many respects with the two major elements that have been responsible for introducing **these** conditions in recent decades into the brotherhood—the “antis” and the liberals! Does he really believe that the rift with “instrumental” brethren or with the Christian Church can be healed simply by the non-instrumental brethren “grieving for them,” à la Judges 21 (155-156), without the cessation of the use of the instrument?

His concern over the challenge that “wide open fellowship” with the denominations proposes to “conscience fellowship” (156-157) is also somewhat amazing in that “conscience fellowship” implicitly argues for a form of “unity in diversity,” which accommodates the aims of the “wide open fellowship” folk.

Chapter Nine—Congregational Fellowship: Immediate Family

He now examines the matter of congregational fellowship. He commits a common blunder of the day in speaking of the local congregations as “families” (159-160). While this expresses a warm and fuzzy feeling, it does not truly express the biblical concept. The church of Christ in its entirety is spoken of as “the house of God” (1 Tim. 3:15), “the household of faith” (Gal. 6:10), and as “the whole family in heaven and earth” (Eph. 3:15). No where in Holy Writ are individual congregations described as families in and of themselves. The concept that Smith proposes is a figment of human sentiment. The local congregation serves to supply edification and encourage-

ment through training, instruction, joint participation in worship and work, and support in times of need, but it is not a separate “family.”

On page 161 he raises a troubling matter that is propounded by his enigmatic response. He refers first to questions that are frequently asked of him by members, especially older members, of the Lord’s church concerning the congregations wherein they hold membership. He is asked:

What should we do now that our congregation has gone off the rails?
Can we stay where we’ve been worshipping for years, now that
they’ve introduced worship teams, drama skits, and Saturday night
seeker services?

Another question asked of him is, “Is there any way that I can keep my membership in a congregation that has appointed deaconesses?” He speaks of the “anguished faces” of these brethren. He calls them “the faces of men and women who don’t understand why change is necessary.” What does he mean by the remark that “change is necessary” within this context? Is he saying that there is a legitimate, scriptural need to introduce into congregational worship the use of “drama skits,” “worship teams,” “and “Saturday seeker services”? Is he maintaining that deaconesses may be *needed* in the local congregation? While it appears that he is sympathetic to the plight of these older members who “have given of their lives in service to the congregation,” and who “have paid for the building which they now see as being desecrated by unworthy worship,” he seems to seek to undermine their concerns over these innovations! He writes of them:

Sure, maybe they *are* traditionalists. Maybe they *are* too concerned about a piece of real estate and not sufficiently concerned about what kind of worship is being lifted up to God. But at least they have earned the right to ask those anguished questions (162).

Are we to take it that there is something inherently wrong with being a “traditionalist,” particularly when it comes to worshipping God according to New Testament tradition (2 The. 2:15; 3:6)? Is it not possible that it is **precisely** because of concern over “what kind of worship is being lifted up to God” that these brethren are asking “the anguished questions”? Also, might not there be a greater motivation for the maintaining of doctrinal purity than materialism?

Pages 162 to 165 provide LaGard’s criteria for when one should leave a particular congregation over disputes like these. He says that one should ask himself:

- 1) Is my discontent a matter of *conscience* or *comfort zone*;;
- 2) What efforts have I made to effectuate change?; 3) What endorsement am I lending by my continued presence?; 4) What good influence might I have by staying?; 5) What are my alternatives?; and 6) Is my discomfort worth the cost of broken fellowship?

Let us now examine what he has to say about each of these seriatim.

1. “Is my discontent a matter of conscience or comfort zone?” He does not expressly state what he means by “conscience” and “comfort zone.” I take the words as referring to the difference between what one genuinely believes to be wrong and just his “feelings” of comfort or discomfort in participating in a specific act. There are times when the two actually overlap. One can be “uncomfortable” about a particular practice due to the fact that it violates his conscience! The former drives the latter! Wherein conscience corresponds to biblical revelation, “comfort zones” can involve critical matters bearing on fellowship.

He asks, “What are we doing as a congregation that crosses the line from *mere style* to *biblical error*?” And he then illustrates by writing: “I may or may not like the raising of hands in worship, for example, but I could hardly deny that there is biblical precedent for raising holy hands to God!” There is a problem with the phrase “mere style.” This is an expression that has become loaded by our liberal brethren. It is a veritable **buzz word** for any innovation one wishes to promote! A further problem with this criterion is that it stops short of establishing just how one determines where “biblical error” begins. As to the illustration itself, it fails to acknowledge the distinct difference between the Hebraic figure of the raising up of holy hands (1 Tim. 2:8ff) and the vain, meaningless practice of the Charismatics. Surely, LaGard is not arguing for the scriptural authority for such misuse of the Scriptures in the defense of banality!

2. “What efforts have I made to effectuate change?” There is nothing really in this section to disagree with other than the fact that it does not stress the role that Bible authority ought to possess in the entire matter. Someone may indeed need to do some “soul-searching” to “discover how” he himself “might need to change,” but such is not relegated to the feelings, nor even the conscience of the individual alone, but to Bible teaching on the matter(s) in question.

3. "What endorsement am I lending by my continued presence?" He states, "Guilt by association is not always legitimate, but it is always assumed!" It depends upon what is meant here by *association*. Obviously, if one is worshipping and working in a particular congregation, then we are talking about fellowship in the full sense of the word.

That we should be concerned that the influence of our actions in fellowship is having upon others is exactly the reason many of us are concerned about brother Smith's activities! His concepts of "common cause" and the five different "levels" of fellowship (not to mention his numerous "sublevels") are causes for **genuine** concern. When he appears regularly with Rubel Shelly, Max Lucado, or those of like belief, then what message does it send to the brotherhood at large? If Smith can see the danger of "association" within a particular congregation that may be in "biblical error," then why does he fail to see the same danger when it comes to lectureships and workshops?

4. "What good influence might I have by staying?" He says, "Maybe every congregation needs a token conservative (or a token liberal) to help stay the course. If all the whistle-blowers leave, who is left to hold the others accountable?" This idea is flawed. It presumes that the *token* conservative can have any real, meaningful pull or influence on the course. If the course is already errant, staying it is no option! Neither will a *token* liberal be of any benefit in "staying the course," if the course is true to the Map-book of God! His efforts will be to the contrary. Brother Smith does admit the possibility that he may be "the one who ends up being influenced." Yea, verily!

5. "What are my alternatives?" He gives only three main options. (1) You may exchange "spirit for doctrine." By this he evidently means that you may leave a congregation that has the right *spirit* but is not right in *doctrine* for one that is right but has the wrong *spirit*. The word *spirit* contemplates attitude, disposition, etc. However, while it is possible to have the right doctrine and be wrong in attitude, as the church at Ephesus did (Rev. 2:1-7), is the opposite truly possible? Can one possess all of the qualities and characteristics of attitude and heart that Christians are to possess but fail to uphold the right doctrine? What about the great quality of *faith* itself? Can we be a people of faith, and yet fail to abide by the teaching of the Book by which faith comes (Rom. 10:17)? The ideal is for one to seek a

congregation which emphasizes both the right teaching and the right condition of both heart and life based upon that teaching!

(2) He says that you may exchange one doctrinal error for another. He says that change does not “guarantee freedom from conflicts of conscience.” He adds, “Usually it’s a matter of whose doctrinal faults you want to put up with most!” (3) He says, “And sometimes there are simply no other options. If, for instance, there is only one congregation in town, the door is pretty much closed.” However, in both 2 and 3 he fails to offer two clear possible answers. One is to commute in order to worship with another congregation that may meet a considerable distance away. A second option is for one to start a new congregation in the community where one lives. Certainly, it would not be easy, and would be fraught with many challenges and trials to overcome. But it can be done, and has been done!

6. “Is my discomfort worth the cost of broken fellowship?” Brother Smith writes: “If a doctrinal issue is what most concerns me, I mustn’t forget that unity among brothers and sisters in Christ is as much a matter of conscience as any other point of doctrine.” He then says that we must ask:

Is the issue at stake sufficiently important that I must shatter the intimacy of a family which has nurtured me and supported me through thick and thin? Will my leaving cause disruption among others in the family? (165).

(However, given his “five levels” of fellowship, it would be utterly impossible to break or sever fellowship from another by definition. If one is not in fellowship with another in a particular congregation {“congregational fellowship”} nor in “conscience fellowship,” then he may be so “in Christ fellowship” or “faith fellowship,” or even {miss him in Christ, hit him in Adam} “universal fellowship!” If that fails for some strange reason, then one can resort to “common cause” association at the very least! The doctrine of fellowship implicitly, according to his view, rules out the very possibility of withdrawal of fellowship on any grounds, including both doctrinal and moral reasons.)

Brother Smith confesses that he has struggled with these same questions but has maintained his fellowship with “brothers and sisters” with whom he “disagrees” doctrinally. He states that the reason for this was not just “an exercise” to maintain “body unity,” but was

for the purpose of outreach to others “who don’t know Christ” in the area where he works and lives.

He states, “It’s easy to be so consumed with the problems of family fellowship that we forget our far greater responsibility to bring others into the family” (165). This smacks of the flawed notion that we must ignore doctrinal problems in the interest of evangelism. The position fails on one major point. It implies an “either-or” condition which does not exist. It implies that there are situations wherein we must either practice evangelism or else defend the faith and that we cannot do both at the same time. Evangelism and defending the faith are not mutually exclusive activities. The latter is involved in the accomplishing of the former (2 Tim. 4:1-4; Tit. 2:1ff; Jude 3). **It is not a matter of having to ignore doctrinal differences for the “greater good” of preaching to the lost.** If we cease to preach the truth, to what shall we have made converts? What kind of family would it be? Certainly, not the family of God as we read of it in the New Testament!

Smith then launches into a rant against “church splits” being fueled today by “personality power-struggles.” This hackneyed approach to broad-brush doctrinal conflicts is too common. It is a shame that LaGard takes up this approach to avoid dealing with each issue he has raised in greater detail from the perspective of Bible authority. How often have brethren simply written a conflict between brethren off by saying, “Well, that’s just a personality clash,” while they avoid truly thinking critically about the issues!

Concerning congregational autonomy, he says that while “we have talked a good line,” we have not practiced it. He says that the talking “hasn’t stopped the brotherhood police from making congregations tow whatever line they happen to have drawn, at the risk of censure and castigation if they don’t.” He then opines, “Let one congregation step out of line and you can be sure that there are plenty of others who are ready to ‘withdraw fellowship’ from it. As if congregations were ever tied together in the first place” (170). Who are the “brotherhood police” here? Why does he not point these rascals out, who would dare demand such of brethren? Or could it be that Smith is here the one given to **acrimony**? Let him state what “lines” are under consideration. Let him identify the specific issues in question. And then let brethren examine his charges in full light. He implies at the close of

the second paragraph that congregations cannot withdraw fellowship from one another. Is this his “understanding” of congregational “autonomy”? Does he believe that the withdrawal of fellowship is an “individual only” action? What if you withdraw from all the individuals of a congregation? The Lord implied that He would withdraw from an entire congregation (Rev. 3:14-16). Were the members of the church at Philadelphia required knowingly to continue in fellowship with the church at Laodicea after the Lord had taken action against that congregation? **May we knowingly fellowship those with whom the Lord will not fellowship?**

Brother Smith admits that “autonomy doesn’t mean total independence” (171), but his view of fellowship contradicts that position. He asserts after the anti-cooperation faction, from whence he sprung, that the contribution that Philippi sent to Paul “was not strictly ‘congregation to congregation.’” He does so by citing the entire Philippians 4:14-19 passage as though it refers only to the goods that arrived to Paul at Thessalonica (v. 16). In this he takes the “anti-cooperation” approach to the text and ignores the grammatical force of the prepositional phrase “from Macedonia” back in verse 15 (cf., Acts 18:5; 2 Cor.11:8-9).

He states, “If congregationally we are free and independent of all others, no congregation is free to depart from the apostolic teaching to which all congregations will be held accountable” (172). But what if a congregation does do just that? According to Smith (171), it cannot be withdrawn from by other congregations. They must continue to fellowship the brethren in that congregation, which offers the opportunity then for the false doctrine(s) of that congregation to infiltrate the others! In the next paragraph he writes:

In earlier chapters I’ve been a bit rough on some of the “brotherhood papers” for what I believe are often attitudes unbecoming brothers, but if they took to the high road of loving confrontation, even those papers could have their place in facilitating dialogue among us.

But what does he mean by “loving confrontation”? Does he refer to the kind of nonsense that goes on at the Nashville Jubilee, Tulsa Workshop, Abilene and Pepperdine Lectureships? Faithful brethren will not accept such tomfoolery as being *confrontational* in any substantial way. False teachers are to be **marked** (Rom. 6:17). Let Smith inform us as to just how this is to be done, and whether or not

“brotherhood papers” can do it! The sting of the pen is what liberalism fears most because it moves brethren to act against their efforts. It has always been so! David Lipscomb was reviled by the Christian Church and the Disciples of Christ, mocked, and depicted as an old woman trying to hold back the tide of the ocean with nothing but a broom. However, his editorial work and his personal articles against their efforts saved many congregations from digression’s destructive influence a century ago!

He praises “our large annual lectureships and workshops” as places where “we can meet beyond the constrictive bounds of conscience to talk openly about matters of conscience” (173). Which lectureships and workshops does he have in mind? I doubt seriously if they are the Annual Denton Lectures, Memphis School of Preaching Lectures or the Spiritual Sword Lectures, or such like! He asserts that there is

no biblical authority for ostracizing congregations (or, worse yet, orchestrating secondary boycotts against anyone who joins with them) simply because they participate in some common effort with which others cannot participate in good conscience (p. 173).

He does not specify what he means by such. What does he mean by the pejorative words “ostracizing” and “orchestrating secondary boycotts”? If he means that brethren cannot withdraw from other brethren who are in error doctrinally, then he needs to say so. If by “secondary boycotts” he means that brethren cannot mark other brethren who are openly hobnobbing with known false teachers, then he needs to be clear on the matter.

He addresses on pages 174-176 the Lord’s Supper and what he calls “table fellowship.” There is nothing specially commendatory about his handling of this section, nor necessarily anything worthy of stern condemnation. He has already undermined his own case on this subject earlier when he contended that “table fellowship” ultimately includes all of mankind **but** is restricted to “kingdom fellowship.” He does recognize that there are times when one, who is a wayward brother, “has to be put on hold until he himself once again considers being a part of the family to be important” (176). He then suggests the possibility of church discipline through withdrawal of fellowship.

PART III—RETHINKING SACRED COWS

Chapter Ten—The Loving Discipline of Disfellowship

LaGard turns to the subject of church discipline as it pertains to the practice of “disfellowship,” or the withdrawal of fellowship. He discusses at some length (179-183) the case of the Collinsville (OK) Church of Christ and its withdrawal of fellowship from Marian Guinn. His insights into this particular case on the **legal** aspects and the congregational motivations are of considerable value. He obviously stands on the side of the Collinsville brethren on the matter and sees the actions they undertook as being from “good intentions sadly gone awry.” He points out that the act of disfellowship was really intended for the spiritual well-being of sister Guinn, though she refused to see it as such.

He does assert: “Church discipline pertains only to the immediate family, not to any other congregation” (183). If such be the case, then why did Paul **in letters that were circulated among the churches** (plural) inform them thereby of the actions that the church at Corinth was to take (and evidently did take, according to 2 Corinthians) against the fornicator in 1 Corinthians 5 and the actions that he took against Hymenaeus and Alexander in 1 Timothy 1? Why write about the departure of Demas (2 Tim. 4:10), if that matter only concerned the church wherein Demas had formerly held membership? What about brethren who read Paul’s letter and may have had some possible contact with Demas?

LaGard does state, “Where discipline is biblically warranted, we have no choice but to administer it” (183). He contends that any behavior involving “a dual threat—to the erring Christian personally and to the church corporately” warrants discipline. He elucidates:

To engage unrepentantly in any behavior that is soul-threatening cannot help but draw the attention and concern of those whose very reason for existence as a spiritual family includes guarding against anything that might put one’s eternal relationship with God in jeopardy (183-184).

He calls disfellowship “a wake-up call” and “a bucket of cold water in the face.” He cites the case of 1 Corinthians 5 by way of illustration. But he then suggests that there are some sins that are outside this criteria and which do not therefore warrant discipline (184).

The next section discusses matters that concern “When the Congregation is Put at Risk” (184-186). He concentrates almost entirely on sins of immorality, especially sexual immorality. He asserts and underscores:

In the absence of some divisive crusade to dissension and strife, *mere differences in doctrinal understanding are not a cause for disfellowship*, nor the fact that someone has left (typically) a more conservative congregation for a ‘liberal’ congregation.

He holds: “Discipline has to do principally with character problems, not conscientious differences among the family of God” (186). Thus, he contends that doctrinal differences arising from a difference “in understanding” are not grounds for withdrawal of fellowship. Only when one stirs up “some divisive crusade leading to dissension and strife,” do doctrinal differences become worthy of action like withdrawal of fellowship. But what is involved in this? What does it take for one to be guilty of a “crusade” of this kind, or how far must one go before it does become necessary to withdraw from him? Is not the current digression a case wherein a “divisive crusade” has been undertaken by the change agents to change the church into a denomination? Or does brother Smith view the change agents as harmless and their doctrines innocuous? Also would the withdrawal be limited to the congregation alone in which he holds membership? What if he refuses to place membership anywhere? Further, false doctrine **on the basis of his earlier criteria** endangers neither the individual who teaches it nor the congregation to whom it is taught! Can you believe it? It is all just a matter of differences in “doctrinal understanding”!

But what about the homosexual who would tell brother Smith that there is simply a difference in understanding as to what constitutes “moral normalcy” or “a personal life-style”? Liberals like to talk about alternate “worship styles”; why not alternate “life-styles”? Homosexuals have been using that claim a whole lot longer than the liberals have been thumping about alternate “worship styles”! The remark that “discipline has to do with character problems” is amazing. Are we to believe that ideas, particularly patently false ideas, have no consequences? Do they not in some way affect character? Often false doctrine and immoral conduct go hand in hand! Julian Huxley believed in the dogmas of Darwinian evolution because it sanctioned his “sexual proclivities,” and Jesse Ferguson’s turning to spiritualism and

universalism was accompanied with a campaign of deceit that almost single-handedly destroyed the early efforts of the Lord's people in Nashville, Tennessee. Read Paul's admonitions in 1 Timothy 4, wherein he warns of **the effects of false doctrines upon the moral activities** of certain folk. Why warn of the **words** of Hymenaeus and Philetus concerning the resurrection, if "differences in doctrinal understanding" have nothing to do with character (2 Tim. 2:16-17)?

LaGard next examines how discipline is to be administered. He concentrates entirely on Matthew 18:15-17 and 1 Corinthians 5. **He does not address the matter of Romans 16:17 or Titus 1:9-11; 3:10** (187). He does state that we need to "put the *congregation* back into *congregational discipline*." However, he would have everyone involved "in the decision-making process," though it may be necessary for "the elders to take the initiative" (188-189). He does not provide any insight into how this is to be done, though he *finds* a basis for such in Leviticus 24! That the entire congregation is to be involved in the act of withdrawal goes without saying, but how could everyone be a part of the "decision-making process" without circumventing or negating the authority of oversight placed squarely in the lap of the eldership of each congregation? What scriptural limitations inhere in this matter?

He deals with the question of love in the act of withdrawal and demonstrates that the two concepts are not mutually exclusive. There are times where "tough love" is called for in the best interest of the party to be disciplined (189-191). I just wish that brother Smith realized that the same motivation can be involved in confronting and withdrawing from brethren who are in error on critical doctrinal matters!

He closes the chapter with a warning about churches becoming "too big" to recognize and carry out the function of congregational discipline, because they are too worldly and morally lax (191-192). His warnings and some examples he gives should not go unheeded. The need to "be not conformed to this world" is ever pressing (Rom. 12:2). However, he needs to see the need to apply such rigor in opposing the doctrinal errors which encourage and occasion the moral errors that he rightly abhors!

Chapter Eleven—False Teachers or False Teaching?

Brother Smith introduces this subject by referring to events surrounding a weekend meeting that he held the previous fall in middle Tennessee. He does not specify the time nor the place of these matters. According to him, some of the brethren had placed a full page ad in the local paper which greatly misrepresented his position on baptism and the doctrine of Hell. He was shocked to find that some were accusing him of not believing that baptism puts one into the kingdom and of rejecting the reality of hell (193). Without the particular ad it is difficult to respond in a more specific fashion. It is true that he does expressly teach that baptism, even as he says in *Who Is My Brother?*, places one in the kingdom. Yet, his notions of a “common law” type of an arrangement in his book on baptism, the idea of Judgment day clemency (that come the day of Judgment we may find that God has changed His mind on the matter and has decided to save some who did not fully obey the Gospel!), and some of his ideas concerning Baptist baptism (which were expressed back in chapter seven of *Who Is My Brother?*) implicitly repudiate the New Testament doctrine on baptism. Brother Smith may not appreciate that assessment, but logic dictates that when a particular doctrine implies a false doctrine, then it must be false.

His teaching on these three matters implies the false doctrine that there are or may be exceptions to God’s law on baptism. As to his belief in Hell, it should be **more carefully** pointed out that he does not believe in the concept of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked in the fire of hell. If the New Testament teaches such punishment, **and it does**, then it can be reasonably asserted that he rejects the New Testament doctrine of hell, **at least by implication**.

He also took umbrage at remarks made in the ad concerning his work of teaching law at Pepperdine (194). The problems of Pepperdine are well-documented and beyond dispute. He, earlier in chapter ten, dealt with the matter of guilt by association, and the damage that can be done to one’s reputation by virtue of his close associates. “Birds of a feather flock together” has become a veritable maxim of conduct. But his relationship at Pepperdine goes much deeper than just an *association* by way of employment. He participates regularly in their religious programs, lectureships, et al. He actively fellowships with much of the staff and faculty. In many ways he promotes the

influence of both the university and his colleagues, not to mention the numerous false teachers who have used the rostrum at Pepperdine to further their own heresies. “Academic freedom” is scant cover for the nakedness of raw apostasy! Smith is correct when he emphasizes that we ought to be careful to consider the context in which one has expressed his views on such matters (194-195). That we should be fair and strive to be fully accurate in stating the views of others is imminently true! But those views, in order to avoid unintentioned misrepresentation, should be stated initially by the original author of the document in **clear, precise, and unequivocal language**. An author owes that to his readers, if he desires to be properly understood. The post-modern practice to employ terms in a constantly changing fashion for effect has become common in academia.

He cites three specific doctrines which he and the author(s) of the ad in question disagreed: (1) whether or not the sovereignty of God permits the granting of clemency to those “who have not obeyed the gospel in its fullness” (195); (2) whether or not the Holy Spirit “works in any other way than through the written Word” (195-196); and (3) the nature of eternal punishment in hell (196). He asserts, “Each of these is a specific, identifiable issue over which reasonable men may differ.” He affirms that God may at the Judgment day indeed extend such clemency as He chooses. He also affirms that the Holy Spirit does operate separate and apart from the written Word. He affirms that hell does not involve eternal, conscious torment, or, as he phrases, “continuing, conscious burning.” Are these views inherently dangerous? Is Smith right in believing that we can disagree on these matters but not break fellowship over them?

First, is there the possibility that one could be led by the notion of the “sovereign extension of clemency” to forego obedience to the gospel or otherwise rely upon some other system of salvation? The Bible still says that the gospel is God’s power, His only power, to save (Rom. 1:16). Those who “obey not” the gospel of Christ will be punished at the second coming of Christ (2 The. 1:5-7). Are we to conclude that these are negotiable truths? God’s integrity and immutability (Heb. 6:18) are as much integral parts of His nature as His sovereignty! If LaGard is seeking to imply that somehow God can contradict Himself or commit some act inconsistent with any one of

His essential attributes simply on the basis of “sovereignty,” then brethren have a definite cause for concern.

Second, as to the second doctrine, brother Smith teaches that Holy Spirit baptism (he frequently cites Acts 1:4-8 and Matthew 3 as involving all disciples of the Lord and not simply the apostles) is received at the same time as water baptism. How he can hold that doctrine, and not expressly contradict the clear teaching of Ephesians 4:5, he has not successfully explained! That this view is a crucial part of United Pentecostal theology, not to mention other Pentecostal groups, he has not dealt with. That brethren should be duly concerned and alarmed about this position is not surprising. What is surprising is that Smith is surprised by it! The matter, however, of a “personal indwelling” is another “red herring.”

Third, may not the rejection of the concept of eternal, conscious torment of the wicked have implications that affect one’s behavior? That doctrine has as much to do with the integrity of God as does the doctrine of heaven. Would it be a small matter to contend that heaven is temporal in nature? The same passage that establishes the eternality of torment for the wicked also establishes the eternality of the reward for the righteous (Mat. 25:31-46). How often have theologians taken this path to wind up ultimately in universalism or outright atheism? Are these consequences negligible? While brother Smith cries for an honest dealing with these *differences* in doctrine, he needs to deal honestly with these matters himself and not try to hide behind the notion that the views expressed do not entail any real spiritual dangers for the souls that accept them! The cavalier notion that “reasonable men may differ” over these things fails to consider the **implications** and **accuracy** of the competing views.

Brother Smith quibbles over the use of the designation “false teacher” that the brethren who sponsored the Tennessee ad used of him (197). He maintains that we should be careful to differentiate between “false teachers” and “false teachings.” He argues that one may be errant about a matter in his teaching, and may then be guilty of teaching something that is false, but not necessarily be a “false teacher.” This, however, is an exercise in semantics. By definition one who teaches “false doctrine” is a “false teacher.” The central issue must focus on whether the doctrine being taught involves belief and/or practice that would endanger the spiritual well-being of one’s

soul, and most often the phrase is used to describe one who is teaching **such** doctrine. One may be ignorantly and honestly teaching it, but that does not change the denotation of the words themselves. The expression does not necessarily involve the **motivation** behind the teaching. That the expression can be used in an **ad hominem** way to squelch debate on the subject in question has always been a danger, but that it can be employed scripturally to describe the activities of a preacher who is proclaiming “damnable heresies” cannot be reasonably refuted! He also laments the practice of “marking, shunning, and refusing fellowship” to those who have been labeled “false teachers” (197-198).

He examines some key passages that, he asserts, brethren have misused in marking and withdrawing from others who possess differences in “doctrinal understanding” to “support false charges about false teachers” (198-201). The first is Ephesians 5:11. He asserts that Paul is only talking about “fruitless *deeds*” and not “fruitless *teaching*.” The context is dealing specifically with the difference between the way in which the Gentiles lived and the way in which the “children of light” are to live. He concludes that “not a single word about teaching doctrinal error” is under consideration here, and that therefore Paul “is clearly not talking about false teachers.” Admittedly, the text does not **explicitly** deal with false teaching, but the Bible teaches as much by **implication** as it does explicitly. Are we to conclude that God only condemns the actions of immoral conduct but not the doctrines and belief systems that **occasion** the conduct? If a particular doctrine implies that one can commit fornication, and one acts upon belief in that doctrine, is not the doctrine itself and the one who teaches it, at the very least, partially at fault in the matter? When one converts someone to an ungodly way of thinking and/or acting, then does he not also bear some onus in the matter (cf., Mat. 23:15)?

The second passage he examines is that of Romans 16:17-18. Because division arising from “doctrinal matters” is not explicitly mentioned here, he again draws the conclusion that false teachers are not under consideration in any way. He states, “Once again we look in vain for an inspired imperative to shun as false teachers those with whom we happen to disagree on some doctrinal matter.” He adds, “As before, we are confronted here with a character problem. The person

Paul is describing is not just *teaching* something, but *doing* something. He is a busybody causing division.”

If a doctrine necessarily implies a conclusion that endangers souls, can it not be of itself the **source** of divisiveness when it is being promoted by brethren? Smith admits that false doctrine **was being taught** by the one who was “causing division.” He says of him, that he was “not just *teaching* something.” His own admission destroys his case! LaGard, if he is not careful, will wind up taking the position that the only grounds for withdrawal of fellowship or marking someone for causing division has to do with matters of character in the sense of moral problems. In doing so, he shall have to separate what a person believes (and teaches) completely from what he practices! He will have to divorce doctrine from behavior. His exposition also overlooks Paul’s explicit reference to the use of “good words and fair speeches” that were being used to “deceive the hearts of the simple” (v. 18). To what do these words refer, if not to some form of false teaching being done?

He then comes to 2 John 9-11 and takes the predictable route of applying the phrase “the doctrine of Christ” here to the teaching **about** Christ, i.e., His incarnation and deity. Carroll Osburn follows this path in his heretical tome, *The Peaceable Kingdom*. That Smith resorts to this tack to get around the implication that false doctrine is a fellowship matter is disappointing. For a thorough refutation of this line of thought common in liberal circles, please examine the various lectures dealing with the text in the very comprehensive *Studies in 1, 2, 3 John* edited by Dub McClish, Roy H. Lanier, Jr.’s, discussion of it in his commentary on the epistles of John, and in Guy N. Woods’ commentary on 2 John. Brother Smith admits here, “At last we are no longer talking about behavior, but teaching.” As long as one is not teaching false doctrine “about the person of Christ,” he does not come under the sanctions of 2 John 9-11, according to Smith’s exposition. Can one properly **believe in the person of Christ while rejecting His teaching**? Did not Jesus Himself demonstrate the illogic of calling Him “Lord, Lord,” but not doing what He has said (Luke 6:46; Mat. 7:21-22)?

Brother Smith engages in a bit of sophistry by asserting: “As used in the New Testament the label ‘false prophet’ is virtually always tied to teaching which destroys the very core of the personhood and

mission of Jesus Christ” (201-202). He then avers, “Not once is the term ‘false prophet’ used in connection with conscientious disputes among brethren over what Christ and his apostles have taught us to do.” The use of “virtually always” shows that even LaGard admits there are **sometimes** when the phrase contemplates other forms of false teaching! What about Jezebel of Thyatira? Jesus said that she “callest herself a prophetess.” The implication is that she was a false prophetess. Jesus said that they of the church in Thyatira “suffered” this ungodly woman “to teach and to seduce my servants to commit fornication, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols” (Rev. 2:20), for which He would punish them. Here then is teaching, that affects immoral activity! She was not denying the deity of Christ. She was encouraging, by her doctrine and practice, immoral activity! The “false prophets” of 2 Peter 2:1 would be individuals who “shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them.” The construction implies that they would teach “damnable heresies,” among which would be the denial of the Lord. These men who would do this had been “bought by the Lord.” But Smith quibbles that, in every case wherein “false prophets” and so on are under consideration, the text contemplates “imposters” or frauds who are pretending to be children of God but are not (202). This is nothing more than the “once saved, always saved” dodge revisited!

The remainder of the chapter goes along in similar vein—seeking to avoid applying “false” to almost any doctrine that is currently prevalent among our liberal brethren and trying to cover for them under the guise of being matters of “conscientious dispute.” If they are such, then let us debate them and put them into the crucible of polemic discussion. Let Smith, Lucado, Shelly, Anderson, and Cope put their signatures to specific propositions that fully reflect what they believe. But we will not “hold our breath” waiting until they do.

The chapter closes with a pathetic and pitiable lament over the way in which brother Homer Hailey, a mentor of Smith, has been treated by the brethren (206-209). Many of us greatly appreciate the many outstanding books that Hailey has written (especially his commentaries), but Hailey’s fall into disfavor among brethren has been a long time coming! His involvement as a leader within and the role he played in indoctrinating young men into the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan home movement separated him from many brethren as far

back as the 1950s, and in recent years he wrote a book on divorce and remarriage which implicitly encourages sexual immorality. This led to a severing of ties between himself and his colleagues among the “Antis.” Smith laments that one book should be used to destroy a man’s career, but he expresses no indignation at all toward Hailey for writing the book in the first place! However, suppose that book defended the idea, “Ye shall be as gods”? Brother Smith would better serve brother Hailey by encouraging him to repent.

Chapter Twelve—The Prospect of Eternal Fellowship

In this chapter LaGard returns to the question of the God’s sovereign right of clemency at the Judgment. He first relates a conflict involving two brethren who confronted him on the subject at “one of our annual lectureships.” He states that his position simply involves the affirmation that “God has prerogative to determine our eternal destiny” (211). No one **realistically** can oppose that statement as far as it goes **in appearance**. Most certainly God is “the judge of all the earth,” and He is sovereign. However, to extrapolate from this that He can **arbitrarily change the terms** of salvation and eternal life at the Judgment Day opens a quagmire that this statement cannot bridge! This approach succumbs to Hume’s apparent dilemma and invective against the existence of God as pertains to moral goodness. Hume argued that theism involves either the idea that a thing is good simply because “God gave it,” as though goodness is an arbitrary decision of God who could have just as easily given the exact opposite, or else God gave it because it is “good,” as though inherent, objective goodness can exist without God. (The answer to this supposed dilemma is given in the *Warren-Flew*, *Warren-Matson*, and the *Warren-Barnhart Debates*. The latter debate especially addressed the matter of ethics.)

It is this former notion that concerns brethren, though brother Smith assures us that he does not accept the idea of “a final judgment characterized by whim and caprice” (212). However, on page 213 he takes an approach to dealing with the problems his speculations have raised by suggesting that the answer lies in the **intersection** between the different truths of the various attributes of God, viz. His mercy, grace, and judgment (or justice). The two great truths he considers are the concept of mercy and grace as opposed to judgment itself. He contends that where these truths *intersect* is where the harmony lies for his view of last day clemency. He says that these truths do not

merge for that would present an improper understanding of their relationship to one another.

The basic problem with this illustration is that it fails to account for the indisputable fact that God is absolute in **all** of His attributes. It cannot be a matter of *intersection*, for that involves thinking of God in a linear fashion as far as His attributes are concerned. The truth is that whenever God has acted, acts, or will act in the future, all of His attributes are necessarily involved. He can do no less and by definition be God. His absolute attributes include His personal integrity and immutability. He cannot act out of harmony with what He has determined by His nature to do nor sworn Himself to do by promise, and that includes the promises of punishment as well as reward. The Psalmist rightly declares: “For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven” (Psa. 119:89), and Jesus proclaims: “Heaven and earth shall pass away, but my words shall not pass away” (Mat. 24:35). The position staked out by Smith stands in direct opposition to this truth! I do not doubt that his motives are pure, but his theology is **wrong**.

He launches into an attempt to bolster his view from Scripture (213-221), but he does not address the key philosophical problem concerning the **absolute** nature of Divine attributes—which render his speculations moot. Trying to reason from the way in which our criminal justice system may work in its flawed and uneven ways to the Supreme Court of Heaven, where the Judge possesses absolute knowledge of all things beforehand and deals with men without partiality, does not avail his case either.

He attempts to raise the specter of “paradoxes” in the Divine nature (221-222), but he admits that paradoxes do not involve self-contradiction. Some of the examples that he cites actually have to do with God’s **accommodative** use of language relative to His nature and attributes. As to how these paradoxes establish logically the conclusion that God **can** set aside His integrity and immutability and let “unbaptized believers” into heaven is **not** shown. He also appeals to the *paradox* between Romans 3:28 and James 2:24 relative to salvation by faith. He contends that there are two separate contexts in view: (1) “the revealed plan of salvation,” and (2) “the Final Judgment.” In the latter, he asserts that God has “the prerogative [by virtue of His sovereignty] to exercise (or not exercise) divine clemency for those who have failed to comply fully with the plan of salvation.”

Smith avers, “Given these distinct contexts, the exercise of divine clemency is only a *present possibility*, not a *future actuality*.” “It would be a mistake of the highest order,” he warns, “to assume a kind of backward causation—to think that what might potentially happen at the Final Judgment changes in any way the divinely-revealed plan of salvation.” He adds, “If God wants there to be unbaptized-believers in heaven, that is up to him.” He then says:

All we know and all we can preach is what we read in the Book. And from what we can read in the Book, there is no such thing as salvation, redemption, or justification apart from penitent, faith-prompted immersion (222).

Why even speculate about it, if we cannot be presently certain that such clemency will be exercised? Might it not be possible that someone may very well “assume a backward causation” relative to their own spiritual condition and go to their death in expectation of something come Judgment Day to cover for their lack of obedience to God’s Word in the here and now? What of souls that may be persuaded of this position and thus act upon it in such fashion? **Why** has Smith troubled the waters by even raising the possibility of it and creating a condition wherein souls can be misled into a false confidence, **if all that we can know and preach “is what we read in the Book”**? Why not speculate that **everyone** will somehow be saved by the exercise of **mass clemency**? Why not reduce every decision of life to a form of “Pascal’s wager”? Why stop at “unbaptized-believers”? Why do we not speculate that God will find a way to extend clemency to inveterate fornicators and homosexuals as well? The entire process opens the door for the specters of denominationalism and universalism to flutter and float among the minds of the folk.

He appeals to Alexander Campbell’s position on the matter (222-223), but here he commits the same fallacies as Mike Cope on the Lunenberg Letter. Where Campbell corresponds to the Bible in teaching, then Campbell is right, but where Campbell does not, he is wrong! Campbell’s views were shaped in part by the denominational background from whence he sprang.

Brother Smith says that there may be some *surprises* in Heaven. He then writes, “If heaven holds surprises, of one thing we can be certain: Everyone who is supposed to be there will be there, and no one who is not supposed to be there will slip in under the curtain”

(225-226). But **how** does he **know** this? All we know is what we “read in the Book,” and he believes the Book defends the possibility of clemency for unbaptized-believers. Where can he logically draw the line? If he appeals to the nature of God Himself as assurance of what he says here, then how does he know about the nature of God? While there are some things we can learn about God from the natural creation (Rom. 1:20), the Scriptures are the only full and complete revelation of the Divine nature and His attributes. Given his position, how can Smith know that Judas Iscariot will not somehow slip in “under the curtain”? Or Nero Caesar? Or Adolph Hitler? Remember that he earlier took the position that we are going to just have to wait until the Judgment at least on some things to see “who is right”! Why not on everything?

Epilogue

The epilogue to *Who Is My Brother?* consists principally of an open letter by the author, F. LaGard Smith, to Max Lucado. Ostensibly it is an appeal to Lucado to draw back from the position of open-fellowship with the denominations and repudiation of the essentiality of baptism that he now occupies. However, based upon Smith’s own admissions and implications of specific positions that he has taken, the letter takes on a sadly comical appearance. Logically in doctrine, Smith has already laid the ground work for his own acceptance of the position of Lucado. Practically speaking, he remains in fellowship with him. Perhaps Smith employs in those situations the same mental gymnastics that he does when meeting with the “Ashton-under-Hill Free Church,” when their instruments are in use. Brother Smith, like brother Lucado, winds up floating along in an imaginary ship!

On some aspects of fellowship brother Smith makes some valuable observations and remarks, but the general position that he has staked out is contrived and flawed. Dangerous implications attend it. It is a “house of cards.” There is little difference between it, practically speaking, and Rubel Shelly’s *I Just Want To Be A Christian*— between the subsequent “Big F” and “little f” fellowship and “Big C” and “little c” church of Christ concepts.

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CORE GOSPEL/BULLS-EYE CONCEPT

Terry M. Hightower



Terry Hightower is a native of Winter Haven, Florida. He is married to the former Vicki McCullough. They have two children, Kacy and Bret.

Terry preached his first sermon while attending Junior College in 1968. He graduated with honors from Polk Community College, attended the University of South Florida, Harding College, and Harding Graduate School of Religion.

He has taught at the Florida School of Preaching, worked with congregations in Arkansas, Tennessee, Florida, Wyoming, and Texas. He edited seven lectureship books while with the Shenandoah Church of Christ in San Antonio, Texas. Terry is presently working with the church in Sachse, Texas. Terry has spoken at various lectureships, youth meetings, and Christian camps. He has written articles for several publications. In 1983 he published the book, *The Case For The Christian Policeman*, which deals with the "war question" and in 1987 he debated Gary Workman on this subject. He also edited *Christ The Controversialist*.

INTRODUCTION

Forasmuch as many teachers in the body of Christ have taken in hand to draw up a narrative or review concerning these "Change Agent Manuals," I will attempt to point out what I hold to be some crucial points that every Christian should notice in getting to the *heart* of the heresies, gaffes, blunders, and inconsistencies taught in these (and other) reductionist¹ handbooks.

PAGES OF CROWDED FACT AND ARGUMENT

When one reads these three volumes² (C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Weed's *The Worldly Church*, Bill Love's *The Core Gospel*, and Carroll Osburn's *The Peaceable Kingdom*) he will see much similarity in methodology to books written by macro-evolutionists³ and should continually keep in mind the famous and very helpful quote by Josiah Stamp:

We all know well that a fallacy that would be obvious to all in a three-line syllogism may deceive the elect in 400 pages of crowded fact and argument [and in "scholarly-appearing footnotes"]....I think

it is a useful exercise for any of us....to reduce any book of whose conclusions we are doubtful into a set of formal syllogisms and lay bare the bones of the argument.⁴

If the arguments given by enemies of God's truth were set forth by their authors in "tidy fashion," with the premises neatly arranged above the conclusion and separated from it by a convenient *therefore*, and then all the propositions expressed in plain and clear language, we would rarely be misled by them. But unfortunately, the reasoning which we meet in ordinary life (even those written down in "scholarly" and/or "well-argued" books) are by no means so orderly and complete.

First, as with evolutionists, I seriously doubt that the men in this particular case have the knowledge and ability to formally set forth their arguments (even if they desired to try it). Second, I think they know (as do the evolutionists) they have been (and will continue to be) more successful if they never set out their pages of crowded fact and argument in such precise fashion to the many brethren who are: (1) unaware of the procedures being used, (2) who are unwittingly impressed by the personalities involved, and (3) who are attracted by the seeming wholesomeness of the conclusions presented.⁵

I do not mean to be slurring the inherent **intelligence** of those involved, nor necessarily their **motives** (1 Sam. 16:7; Mat. 7:1-2), since from their extreme epistemological prejudice against rationality and logic they **themselves** may simply be unaware of the fallacies involved. I will not hold my breath until it happens, but it would be the primary step toward biblical, God-mandated unity if these brethren would simply recognize the truth of the matter as stated by John Robbins:

If logic does not govern all thought and expression, then one cannot tell true from false. If one rejects logic, then when the Bible says that Jesus suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, dead, and buried, and rose again the third day, these words actually mean that Jesus did not suffer, was not crucified, did not die, was not buried, and did not rise again, as well as Attila the Hun loved chocolate cake and played golf. The distinctions between true and false, right and wrong, all disappear, for there can be no distinctions made apart from using the law of contradiction.⁶

Instead of attacking us as if we were upholding Rationalism instead of rationality, and confusing "Scottish Sectarian Legacy in American Restoration"⁷ with the art of correct reasoning itself, liberal

brethren must recognize the following truths if a God-given unity (Isa. 1:18; 1 The. 5:21; 1 Pet. 3:15) is ever to be attained:

The use of logic is not optional. Logic is so fundamental, so basic, that those who attack it must use logic in order to attack logic. They intend the words they write, "Logic is invalid," to have specific meanings. The opponents of logic must use the law of contradiction in order to denounce it. They must assume its legitimacy in order to declare it illegitimate. They must assume its truth, in order to declare it false. They must present arguments if they wish to persuade us that argumentation is invalid. Wherever they turn, they are boxed in. They cannot assault the object of their hatred [this is called **misology**] without using it in the assault....they do not realize...that their position and action are dependent upon rules that they reject. They must use the rules of logic in order to belittle logic.⁸

WHAT TO LOOK FOR FROM NEW HERMENEUTIKERS ABOUT FELLOWSHIP

As the logician Black points out in regard to common arguments made in the marketplace of ideas:

the conclusion may come before the premises or even be omitted altogether, vital steps may be left for us to guess or understand, the language may be far from clear, and the use of rhetorical devices appealing to emotion and prejudice may add to the general disorder.⁹

At great risk of being called unloving, legalistic, right-wing, un-Christian, ignorant, uneducated, radically sectarian, and even a mean Bible-spouting "proof-texter," I would cite all three volumes being reviewed as classic examples of this last statement by Black, especially in reference to their views on fellowship. Not only is Black's statement descriptive of the view set out by the reviewed books in regard to "Christian fellowship," but it also applies to numerous other errors found between the covers of each volume.

HAS BEARDSLEY BEEN READING THEIR MAIL?

It is almost as if the logician Beardsley has been studying the three books assigned to me for review when he sets forth¹⁰ the four most common techniques of **oversimplifying** and **distraction**. He cites: (1) **Appeal to emotion**—which includes the "tugging-at-the-heart" positive appeal to Christian unity and perhaps especially through the use of emotive language in referring negatively to one's opponents and their positions; (2) **Flattery**—to make the audience feel good about itself (and indirectly about the flatterer) as in bragging on good

emphases or things from one's pioneer religious heritage before "turning to rend them"; (3) **Appeal to illegitimate authority**—as when one cites "restorationists who agree with me" rather than the Scripture, and also when implying the "authority" cited as being free from relevant bias (e.g., "serious scholars demanding adequate explanation in terms of the literary and historical milieu and who use controlled analysis, which interprets the Biblical text in its own linguistic, historical, and cultural settings," thus providing "the essential matrix within which non-sectarian Christianity can emerge and flourish, developing responsible theological perspective within an ever-changing culture"¹¹); (4) The **ad hominem argument**—

Obviously, in a dispute, it is one thing to talk about the conclusion at issue, and another thing to talk about the people who are disputing—their motives, ancestry, or whatever. This is a form of distraction, for then attention is no longer directed to the matter at hand (*ad rem*), but to the person (*ad hominem*).¹²

There are only two groups that I can think of who might come close to the New Hermeneutikers in their ability in these matters: macro-evolutionists, and political "spin-doctors." Such deceptiveness may be intentional or unintentional on the part of these brothers, but a fallacy is a fallacy regardless of the arguer's intention.

LET THE READER BEWARE!

False teachers will attempt to sometimes even "turn truth on its head" in order to place the blame for various problems. Ahab did this by means of **The Loaded Question**: "And it came to pass, when Ahab saw Elijah, that Ahab said unto him, Is it thou, thou troubler of Israel?" But God's man Elijah properly responded by answering with precision: "I have not troubled Israel; but thou, and thy father's house, in that ye have forsaken the commandments of Jehovah, and thou hast followed the Baalim" (1 Kin.18:17-18; cf., Acts 17:6).

Our Lord refused to allow the Sadducees to "slip in" a suppressed (i.e., unstated) premise which was necessary to prove their case against him in Matthew 22:28-30. We also must learn to recognize the techniques of false teachers:

But there arose false prophets also among the people, as among you also there shall be false teachers, who shall privily bring in destructive heresies...And in covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you...and by their smooth and fair speech they

beguile the hearts of the innocent (2 Pet. 2:1, 3; Rom. 16:18; cf., Col. 2:8; 1 John 4:1).

THE CENTRAL ERROR INVOLVED: WHOSE OX IS GORED?

Though you will never find them doing so, the central fallacy in all three volumes can be set forth as an un-biblical and ungodly Pragmatic Philosophy¹³ in the following manner:

1. If the "Old Hermeneutic" viewpoint of fellowship does not allow unity-in-diversity to the extent that we can include in our fellowship those who differ on things like X, Y, and Z, then the "Old Hermeneutic" viewpoint of fellowship is false. (P É Q)
2. The "Old Hermeneutic" viewpoint of fellowship does not allow unity-in-diversity to the extent that we can include in our fellowship those who differ on things like X, Y, and Z. (P)
3. Therefore, the "Old Hermeneutic" viewpoint of fellowship is false. (\ Q)

This argument is valid, the minor premise is true, but the major premise is false. Biblically, the real question ought to revolve around whether differences on doctrine X, Y, or Z "make a difference" in reference to one's salvation. Yet, one instead finds New Hermeneutic authors continually involved in a "results oriented" philosophy in which the central objection to our lack of religious unity among ourselves and with our religious neighbors involves the (explicit or implicit) allegation that our Old Hermeneutic simply does not work. Most of the time they do not do anything other than *list* what they think should not be regarded as a matter of division. Given professed "Christian Scholarship," the Old Hermeneutic is hopelessly out of date and has only caused multitudinous religious splinters and splits which are then quite unfairly blamed on both sides involved or illogically attributed to the common hermeneutical methodology used by both. They never seem to realize that the fault just might lie in **the error itself** which was arrived at by a misapplication of the Old Hermeneutic to the specific issue at hand!

When we *differ* with the bank as to our balance, should we "throw out" the one thing which can bring about harmony—namely the proper use of addition, subtraction, multiplication, and division? Of

course not! Thus, New Hermeneutikers commit the fallacy of **False Cause**, which occurs whenever the link between premises and conclusion depends on some imagined causal link: “after this, therefore on account of this” or “not the cause for the cause.”¹⁴

MY LIST OR YOURS?

I remember one brother in the 70s would display a lengthy “accordion” tract upon which he had listed over one hundred topical biblical *issues* (similar to the ones brought up by Osburn and others today). He would ask brethren where they stood on these matters. The bottom line was always: “Brethren have always disagreed on these and a thousand more issues and always will.” (This is true, but at least **some** issues are “heaven or hell” issues which even these brothers will finally get around to admitting when pressured!) After using this tract upon me, this brother then added with emphasis: “Why, even a **husband** and a **wife** do not agree on all these things,” to which I immediately responded: “Yes, it may well be true that they don’t, but depending upon the *issue*, a husband or a wife **can** end up going to Hell!” Rather than merely presupposing or assuming that certain issues are matters of option when in fact they may very well be obligatory, and then mixing them with issues which most would agree truly constitute matters of judgment, our libertine brethren must be forced to scripturally prove such “issue-by-issue.”

CAN ONLY ONE DOCTRINAL ERROR DAMN US?

Another “suppressed premise” of New Hermeneutikers needing study is their implied notion that if a person is sincere, one sin cannot damn them. But as a “test case,” let us imagine that I advocate (in opposition to my wife’s view) the recreational use of **heroin** or **cocaine** or uphold the view that in some circumstances **homosexual actions** are not sinful? Liberals repeatedly *chirp* that: “After all, there is no such thing as human infallibility when it comes to applying the principles of exegesis and hermeneutics. Brothers in Christ must learn to ‘bear with one another’ in love.”¹⁵ Are we both merely under “God’s umbrella of grace” or exempt from responsibility because we are both “fallible finite humans”? No! Whatever else Peter and Barnabas were right about concerning the gospel, unless and until they repented of their “dissimulation” which Paul confronted them about, they “stood condemned” (ASV) for not walking uprightly according

to the truth of the gospel” (Gal. 2:11, 13-14). Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5) demonstrate that though they were doing a lot of things right and even doing good with their money, **both** husband and wife can go to hell for one sin! In regard to James 2:10, some will even claim that the principle cited therein is not part of the New Covenant when arguing against a position with which they disagree and which others of us are maintaining is a test of fellowship (e.g., marriage-divorce-and remarriage, premillennialism, mechanical instruments of music in worship, etc.), but then (without pointing out what they are doing if, in fact, they even recognize such) they turn back around to use the principle when their own pet Fellowship Matter or “ox is gored.” I have personally had one such brother (in a loving manner, of course) apply the Old Testament epithet “soweth discord” (Pro. 6:19) to myself as if that one doctrinal error **could** damn me, and this brother wrote the book which taught that only New Testament commands (i.e., imperatives) are binding. Consistency thou art a jewel!

In the face of a cocaine promoter in their town and public schools, I dare say that most liberals will jettison such statements as: “Salvation does not hinge upon the acceptance or rejection of a particular doctrine, but rather in my willingness to trust in Christ as Lord and Savior.”¹⁶ In attempting to be consistent they will normally try desperately to “link” the particular doctrine being discussed with their concocted “core/bullseye/non-sectarian” reductionist position. When faced with Paul’s confrontation with Peter and Barnabas, they will say something like: “Well, you have to understand that this strikes at the very core or bullseye part of the gospel because God is no respecter of persons,”¹⁷ utterly failing to see their own grossly contradictory position. Never kid yourself into thinking that an New Hermeneutiker has “no standardized list” as to “who or what” is “in or out” in reference to fellowship! (Apparently I am not on their “in” list!)

It becomes a little tiring to hear our loving, liberal “bulls-eye, core gospel, peaceable kingdom” folks scold us for what they **themselves** ultimately end up doing (Rom. 3:21). As demonstrated in the three books under review, the usual approach by such brethren is to refer to numerous biblical matters upon which some brethren from the past or present have **erroneously** categorized as “Obligatory” instead of correctly classing them as “Optional,” and then they improperly draw

the conclusion that the “Direct Statement/Example/Implication” approach of the Old Hermeneutic is faulty. (As earlier noted, this is comparable to going over one’s checkbook and citing various errors in addition/subtraction/multiplication/division and then concluding that mathematics is the culprit!) As previously noted, these same brethren (especially when pressed about the matter) will eventually end up with their **own** list of specific doctrinal items they maintain are implied by their “core” or “non-sectarian” gospel.

THE *VERY* PEACEABLE KINGDOM

Despite being filled with pages of “crowded fact and argument,” nowhere in Osburn’s treatise, *The Peaceable Kingdom* (written to the very elect), do we find him reducing his material into syllogisms which “lay bare the bones” of his argument. His little soft-bound treatise did not make it onto the ACU presses, but at least it can be said that he actually attempted to wrestle with 2 John 9-11, a primary Bible text which is involved in setting forth the biblical doctrine of fellowship.¹⁸ Osburn maintains that the Greek (and thus English) phrase concerning abiding in the doctrine of Christ in 2 John 9 is to be regarded as “objective genitive.” Thus, he alleges that it only entails the “doctrine about Christ” and must **not** be regarded as “subjective genitive,” which would then entail the totality of doctrine which Christ taught in the New Testament. Since other brethren have already more thoroughly falsified this viewpoint,¹⁹ I will just use the simplest, non-Greek method of Substitution:

1. If the “doctrine of Christ” in 2 John 9a is referring only to the atonement (or who Christ is), then 2 John 9b teaches that so long as a person initially believes and keeps on believing correctly about the atonement (or who Christ is) he has “both the Father and the Son” and thus is saved regardless of whatever else he believes or does. ($P \supset Q$)
2. The “doctrine of Christ” in 2 John 9a is referring only to the atonement (or who Christ is). (As per Osburn and others) (P)
3. Therefore, 2 John 2b teaches that so long as a person initially believes and keeps on believing correctly about the atonement (or who Christ is) he has “both the Father and the Son” and thus is saved regardless of whatever else he believes or does.²⁰ ($\therefore Q$)

Interestingly, in contradistinction to what he calls “the propositional truth approach of Fundamentalists,”²¹ Osburn claims the following about his own approach: “Truth exists, but conservatives [i.e., New Hermeneutikers like himself] content themselves with the search for truth, laying no unique claim to its possession.”²² Is this supposed to cause us to marvel at the piety of such people? This “search for truth” business reminds me of the old Spanky And Our Gang mutt that acted as a *motor* in their *car*. The dog was placed in a cage on a wide belt hooked to turn the *car*’s wheels where he would run after a cat placed in the cage in front of him, but alas, he **never could catch** him! But does Osburn lay a unique claim to possessing the truth that: (1) “truth exists,” and (2) “conservatives content themselves with the search for truth”? While appearing not to do so, even agnostics make knowledge claims about their agnosticism—and very audacious ones at that! As per Osburn, “religious rednecks of the post-bellum south”²³ raised intramural issues among themselves such as instrumental music and missionary societies which “in the hands of polemicists and debaters proliferated to over eighty-five issues which have divided churches and contributed to the current crisis.”²⁴ Even after setting forth his false view of 2 John 9-11 as being “objective genitive,” Osburn quite incredibly makes the following admission which “undoes” his entire basic concept on fellowship: “Certainly, 2 John 9 was never intended as the only criterion for disfellowship.”²⁵ He then proceeds to emulate Old Hermeneutikers in citing modifying remote texts (e.g., 1 Cor. 5:2ff; 2 The. 3:6ff) to declare his own conclusion:

Involving as it does a christological matter vital to Christian communal life, Scripture plainly requires the avoidance of those who claim to be servants, yet destroy the Christian system by defective christology or conduct.²⁶

Pardon me, but this is exactly the reason faithful brethren (Old Hermeneutikers to Osburn) are willing to withdraw over such items as marriage-divorce-and remarriage, premillennialism, congregational organization, and numerous other items not found on Osburn’s own “list”! Note the following argument:

1. If the Bible teaches there is no “set number” of specific issues which are the only issues deserving of Christian withdrawal, then New Hermeneutic arguments which in-

- volve the notion that a long list of specific issues makes one's hermeneutic faulty are wrong themselves. ($P \supset Q$)
2. The Bible teaches there is no "set number" of specific issues which are the only issues deserving of Christian withdrawal: Mat. 28:20 "all things whatsoever I commanded you"; cf. Mat. 23:23-24; Acts 20:27; Note the import of Jesus' statement, "and many such like things ye do" (Mark 7:13) and Paul's statement, "and such like" (Gal. 5:21). (Note: This does **not** mean that no one can determine **any** specific issues deserving withdrawal—just that the Bible is "wide open" to either explicitly or implicitly deal with any new issue contrary to the teachings of Christ that false teachers might "invent" and teach. Thus, neither the length of one's listing of such matters nor the divisions which might result from it has anything to do with the two crucial questions: (1) "Does Christ's gospel authorize it"—Col. 3:17, and (2) "Is it obligatory or optional?"—Mark 7.) (P)
 3. Therefore, the New Hermeneutic arguments which involve the notion that a long list of specific issues makes one's hermeneutic faulty are wrong themselves. ($\therefore Q$)

Given enough time to ask him questions and to receive "straight answers," I am confident I can get the Professor himself to set out a list of **more** than eighty-five issues which **he** has concluded "destroy the Christian system." In regard to such current fads as Bostonism, I have noticed that even "non-controversy, non-argumentative driven, tolerant" liberals will "respond to issues already existing in a given environment....[and in] so doing....concentrate on negative judgments of contemporary concerns"²⁷ Aren't you glad that none of the New Hermeneutic is "inherently divisive" like our own and allows us to get away from "issue-oriented" preaching so that we lose contact with our present culture?

ARE NEW HERMENEUTIKERS REALLY GRIDLESS?

One cannot help but think that perhaps Osburn himself has a preconceived New Hermeneutic "grid" or "matrix" (that he so readily sees in us naïve proof-texters whom he regards as using "fundamentalist methodology"), to which 2 John 9-11 has to conform.²⁸ Is it possible that Osburn could "impose upon the text a human expectation"?²⁹ No, as he says about himself and all scholarly new

hermeneutikers: “The conservative approach to scripture does not begin with preconceived constructs, but with the text itself.”³⁰ It is certainly comforting to know that Osburn and his cohorts have no presuppositions coming into the Bible text, especially such vulgar things like “a rationalistic view of inerrancy” (including the horrible mandate of—**dare I say it?**—“plenary verbal inspiration”) and “the propositional truth approach.”³¹

OSBURN’S MATRIX EXPOSED

Osburn’s “grid,” “matrix,” or “human expectation” surely centers upon what he calls *sectarianism*,³² which has as its main odious (to him) ingredients the ideas of “exclusiveness,” “militancy,” and “argumentativeness.” This is done in spite of the fact that God’s faithful people (e.g., Moses, Joshua, all the prophets, John the Baptist, Jesus Himself, Paul, etc.) have maintained these points because Truth has priority over unity. Truth is inherently divisive! Our New Hermeneutic brethren need to *rediscover* Jesus’ explicit declaration:

Think not that I came to send peace on the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. For I came to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law: and a man’s foes *shall be* they of his own household (Mat. 10:34-36)!

They need to locate Paul’s Holy Spirit given declaration: “I hear that divisions exist among you; and I partly believe it. For there must be also factions among you, that they that are approved may be made manifest among you” (1 Cor. 11:18b-19)! Christ’s kingdom/church is only “peaceable” in the true sense when those “that are approved [of God]” agree on what are matters of obligation and on what are matters of option.

SHOULD WE SING SONGS ABOUT “MILITANCY”?

Over and over again Osburn either explicitly or implicitly attacks the biblical phenomenon of “Truth is prior to Unity” in regard to “exclusiveness, militancy, and argumentativeness.” Typical of other New Hermeneutikers who are of course always themselves “above the fray,” he aims at us “sectarians” such terms as “splintered” (vi), “intramural disputes” (4), “argumentative sermons” (7), “defenders of the faith” (10), “religious toleration” (19), “rancorous animosity” (29), “serious controversy arose” (31), “quarreled and split” (34), “sectarianism that seeks to justify itself in terms of where others are

wrong” (36), “a denominationalism more intense and more intolerant it would be difficult to conceive” (43). By way of summary at this point Osburn even takes time to quote (46) Harrell’s kind, irenic observation: “The twentieth-century Churches of Christ are the spirited offspring of the religious rednecks of the post-bellum South.” Though I’m sure Osburn smiled with *agape* love when he included this quotation, it still prompts one to ask: “Were John the Baptist, Jesus Christ, and Paul the ‘spirited offspring of the religious rednecks’ of post-Pharisaic Judaism?” Christian, take heart! If you are called a “Bubba” for practicing exclusiveness, militancy, and argumentativeness like John, Jesus, and Paul—just remember that you are in Good Company!

MOTIVE JUDGMENTS OF THEIR BRETHREN

Osburn is again quick to pick up his man-made aversion or grid in declaring that “debate and controversy characterized the relationship of the Churches of Christ with other religious groups” (49). Further terms and phrases are used, such as: “open-mindedness” (57), “an obscurantist and separationist attitude, often defended with an anti-scholarly, anti-cultural pugnacity” (58), “Stress upon rigid conformity led to harsh, arrogant condemnation on all who differed and intolerance prevailed” (63), “breaking of fellowship over disapproval of a wide variety of matters of thought and practice” (71), “proof-texting [2 John 9]...to eliminate from fellowship anyone with whom one disagrees” (73), “a disjunctive legalistic extremism which *reveals* [note Osburn’s motive judgment here!] in detachment and insularity, creating division and sub-division that knows no end” (92), “rancorous vilification of those with whom there is disagreement” (93), “a spiritual aristocracy whose exclusivistic tendencies are exhibited in terms of an arrogant Gnostic separation from ordinary Christians” (119), “a judgmental attitude surely alienates” (122), “in an obnoxious and contentious manner” (122).

Osburn never gets around to explaining why his own opposition (which I am assuming here!) to using cocaine, homosexual actions, or partial-birth abortion is never described in such pejorative terminology! Can anyone even imagine Osburn applying the term “witch hunter” to himself about his negative view of cocaine, homosexuality, or partial-birth abortion? I will pay any reader (including Osburn) \$2

per quotation for any such descriptions by liberals **of themselves** about the specific doctrines which **they** presently oppose!

Furthermore, can the reader not see that his false view of fellowship has “opened the door” to the notion that we can fellowship just about any and all types of church groups (e.g., “Peyote-Smoking Churches” or the Metropolitan Community Churches which either are homosexual or approve of homosexuality) so long as we do not practice or condone such in our own congregations! Such fits Osburn’s reductionist criterion alleged to be from Jesus in Matthew 25:

Traditionalists seem to feel very uncomfortable [note once again the psychological analysis here] with Jesus’ beckoning into the Eternal Presence those who do not have the long list of “approved” qualifications, but who cared enough to make a difference in the lives of those who needed help...Whether one likes it or not, the biblical view of eternal judgment clearly indicates that there are those who are out there in the name of God making a difference in people’s lives and keeping their lives holy before the Holy Great One are the ones who are in great shape...While religionists would add considerably to the list of what it takes to be “saved,” Matthew is clear about God’s own list. God will settle for people treating others the way they would be treated themselves. Yet traditional religion cries out to God, “How unfair! We have this carefully devised list of religious items that we *know* reflects true righteousness!” But God says, “I’ll settle for loving your neighbor. Don’t miss my point!”³³

In reference to promoters of recreational drug use, homosexual activism, and abortion-on-demand will Osburn join us as a “traditionalist”? Does he “feel very uncomfortable” with these people so long as they: (1) do not carry the long list of approved qualifications he dislikes so much about us, and (2) are out there in the name of God making a difference in people’s lives? It is surely going to be interesting when the “druggies,” members of homosexual churches, and pro-abortion churches read the professor’s view toward our Lord **not** “being involved in the great issues that divided Judaism in that day”³⁴ and that the “salient hallmarks of the kingdom to Jesus were *attitudinal*, having to do with the respectful treatment of others (Lk. 18:6ff).”³⁵ Two questions: (1) Will our ACU professor advocate vigorously the “issues” of drugs, homosexuality, or abortion to the point of “splitting” congregations? (2) If so, is he admitting that he has put these issues “at the forefront of identification of genuine Christianity”?³⁶ Let us be fair and spread some sauce on the gander

and not just the goose! It is just too bad Peter did not think to use Osburn's arguments and pejorative terms against Paul's "issue" with him in Galatians 2! If truly a legitimate procedure, using such allegations and terms one can "get out of any charge" made against him—even a charge by a New Hermeneutiker!

Aside from the teachings of the non-necessity of baptism (Acts 22:16) and of membership in God's church (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:25) in his lengthy quotation above, one should note the subtle "*out*" Osburn leaves for himself were we to ask him about such moral issues as cocaine usage or homosexuality. He includes the phrase, "and keeping their lives holy." Once again Osburn allows for **his own (non-oppressive, of course)** "carefully [?] devised list of religious items" that **he** and other liberals "know reflects true righteousness" but which he readily censures in others of us. Thus, he violates not only his own rule, but will **himself** "add considerably to the list of what it takes to be 'saved'", going past what he cites as God's settling for "loving your neighbor." Thus, he once again practices the fallacy of **Special Pleading**.

I will here offer \$5 to the person who asks and gets a response from Osburn regarding what he will say if a cocaine-promoter or partial-birth abortionist were to probe Osburn's position on cocaine or such an abortion by using his own words of conclusion:

Matters only a few centuries old are too new to be called "old paths."
We discuss them. We work with them. But we allow to form our identity only what God Himself established as priority. Allowing God to establish priorities will effect change. The look of such religion will be different from that of our forefathers.³⁷

After all, the ACU instructor declares that we must not "define ourselves in terms of how we differ from others"!³⁸ Why does he not see that to be **for** something is also to be **against** it's negative (Mat. 12:30; Mark 9:40)! Further on, Osburn says: "We should not be surprised if churches look a little different from one another, reflecting the same sort of unity in diversity as is evidenced in the New Testament churches themselves," to which I say, "Amen, my brother!" and kindly suggest an item-by-item discussion of just what constitutes such unity, for that is what I desire also.

PRAGMATISM PAR EXCELLENCE

Professor Osburn further “tips his hand” to expose the Philosophy of Pragmatism guiding his whole approach when he says:

If we are to have a truly significant impact upon the national and international scene, faculties of religion [pardon me, but could you mean **yourself**, brother Osburn?] must play leading prophetic [we can only hope he does not mean comparable to Don Finto in Nashville!] roles in channeling and facilitating whatever changes loom ahead [hence William Woodson’s must-read volume correctly entitled *Change Agents And Churches Of Christ*]. An outdated curriculum [translate as “what the rest of us mossbacks believe”] from a sectarian past [i.e., the history of churches of Christ in America] that placed emphasis upon transmitting doctrinaire positions will not suffice if we would engage convincingly the larger arenas of current religious thought. [Funny how those alleged “doctrinaire positions” were used in evangelism to bring thousands of people into Christ!].³⁹

THE FALLACY OF FALSE DICHOTOMY

Osburn’s false doctrine on fellowship stems from his **False Dichotomy** concerning unity and restoration.⁴⁰ This logical fallacy is also called “false bifurcation” or the “either-or fallacy,” which is committed when one premise of an argument is a disjunctive statement that presents two alternatives as if they were jointly exhaustive. Osburn asserts:

Instrumental music and missions [sic] societies may appear inadequate reason [sic] for schism, but they attest a significant theological rupture that had roots as far back as Stone and Campbell, whose divergent views of unity (moderation) and restoration of the ancient order (legalism) set an agenda for division.⁴¹

Note his assertion that “moderation” and “unity” go together, while “restoration of the ancient order” is subtly equated with “legalism”!

One might do well here to note how the abortionist frames his view with the psychologically **positive** term of “pro-choice” and frames his antagonist’s viewpoint **negatively** as “anti-abortionist,” which is a subtle form of an **Ad Hominem** (abusive) argument. Should we not prefer and insist upon the “even-steven” terms of “Pro-Life” and “Pro-Death”? Whereas it is possible for the abortion issue to be set up in the form of Strong Disjunction not involving one in the False Dichotomy fallacy, Osburn’s view on fellowship ignores the fact that God’s unity could (and does!) involve the restoration of the

ancient order of things as the means of true Bible unity and scriptural tolerance!⁴²

In a viewpoint which (if followed by the brethren) is guaranteed to destroy the Lord's unique and precious body/kingdom/church, our dear professorial brother has even preached and transcribed a whole "sermon" entitled "Identifying Marks Of The Church" in which he attempts to falsify truths taught by faithful brethren in order to restructure Christ's Church/Fellowship into a Golden Rule/Attitudinal & Good Deed Only "Peaceable Kingdom."⁴³ He regards the material set forth in the familiar and standard charts by our brethren in the past and now merely as "sectarian definitions of previous eras."⁴⁴ He makes the unbelievable statement: "But the identifying marks of a church do not consist of how we differ from our religious neighbors...*on any issue!* [emp. his]."⁴⁵ Can you not see the implications of this heinous, Hell-spawned doctrine?

OSBURN IMPLIES WHAT?

According to our ivory-tower ACU professor, the founder of one's church can be Joseph Smith (Mormon), founded in Hot Springs (Assemblies of God), during the 1500s (Lutheran), with the head on earth being Pope Paul (Catholicism)! One can thus organize the church of his choice in any way it pleases him—with women elders, monarchical and diocesan bishops, a clergy-laity distinction, a "board of deacons," presidents, and popes, *ad nauseum!* Conformity to Scripture on nit-picky points of doctrine allow us this kind of marvelous "unity"!

In the preface to his book, Osburn actually decries the twenty denominational groups and names he counted in Nigeria and alleges that a "rediscovery of God's ancient intent for Christian fellowship is mandatory," but with his *solution* which (among other crucial matters) eliminates (1) an inerrant Bible; and (2) the name, organization, and work out of the "identifying marks of the church," he is left with no solution at all. With Osburn's blessing, one can name the church of our Lord The Church of Christ Scientist, The Body of Osburn, The Churches of Rubel (or Lucado), and The Bride of Leonard Allen! Instead of scriptural designations for those in the Body like disciple, saint, brethren, children, or Christian, one can (supposedly) with God's approval call himself a Jehovah's Witness, a Nazarene, a Mennonite, a Presbyterian, or a Baptist! One can draw up a creed

other than Jesus Christ and make people confess it! If you want something other than the Word of God as the rule of faith and practice—such as a Westminster or Augsburg Confession, Methodist Discipline, Baptist Manual, Catholic catechism, or even an alleged Direct operation of the Holy Spirit—nobody can forbid it! Given his position, all such is unimportant. It should be pointed out that with the liberal view of fellowship, missionary efforts attempting to bring about unity will die! To see Osburn's view as "rediscovery of God's ancient intent for fellowship" is to cause one to conclude: "If they are spiritually fine, why waste time and risk life, limb, and disease to encompass land and sea to reach them?" Apparently it is only (1) the "unchurched," and (2) those of us in churches of Christ (Rom. 16:16) who still contend for the faith against the New Hermeneutic who are really in need of the gospel!

In view of the foregoing evidence, I reject Osburn's false and inconsistent position that so long as one believes that "Christ is the son of God" there "should be room in the fellowship" over such issues as Divorce and Remarriage, the role of women in the church, instrumental music in worship, the binding of the one-cup/eating-in-the-meeting-house/orphan home/church cooperation/saints-only issues, whether the Lord's Supper must be taken every Sunday, premillennialism, congregational organization, "soteriological matters such as whether baptism is 'for' or 'because of' the remission of sins, and the inerrancy of the Bible"⁴⁶ Is it not amazing that John the Baptist lost his head over refusing to compromise in fellowshiping those in error on what Osburn calls a "paltry issue" that kills the spirit?⁴⁷

THE TINY CORE GOSPEL

Bill Love is the preacher at the Bering Drive congregation in Houston who has shared the work there with preacher/elder Edward Fudge of *The Fire That Consumes* fame⁴⁸ wherein Fudge maintains the "no conscious unending punishment for the lost" view, to which even various conservative denominationalists reacted and refuted. Many of the same fallacies abound in Love's *The Core Gospel: On Restoring The Crux Of The Matter* that we have discussed in more detail using Osburn's volume. Love also commits the same central error of reducing fellowship down to an alleged normative "core gospel" through which he implies the Spirit works with enormous

power. Does this mean that the Spirit does **not** work with enormous power through his alleged “non-core” gospel? His “core gospel” idea then causes him to object to any system which does not allow unity-in-diversity on certain issues which he has decided or deduced ought not to count:

Sometimes worthy secondary matters have captured our attention and have become and still seek to become the center of our proclamation: restorationism, millennialism, the church itself, cooperation between congregations, self-esteem, church growth, family relationships, the role of women in the church, or principles of biblical interpretation. All of these are important secondary matters. None of them is the core gospel.⁴⁹

Along with Osburn, he also ultimately blames the Old Hermeneutic for division and disfellowship and, arguing the same Pragmatic Philosophy, alleges: “We were powerless to bring about unity. Not only could we not unite Christendom, we could not even avoid division among ourselves.”⁵⁰ Once again, New Hermeneutikers argue that unity has priority over truth, but nothing could be further from the truth (Pro. 23:23; John 8:32; Mat. 23:23b)!

Following Osburn’s lead, in his own sort of hodge-podge way that at least seems to be a little more systematic, Love uses 319 pages of “crowded fact and argument” without really proving anything. He thus reminds me of a better-than-average, organized macro-evolutionist. Though definitely more subtle with it, Love criticizes and confuses the reader concerning logic and rationality.⁵¹ In another parallel with Osburn, Love decries the “pugnacious” and “polemical preaching” even when it is about the Cross!⁵² He also joins Osburn in psychoanalyzing the effect of the philosophical and sociological background (i.e., the Enlightenment, John Locke, Francis Bacon, Calvinism’s excesses, Rationalism) surrounding those living in the 1800s.⁵³ He, too, confuses Rationalism with rationality. Both Love and Osburn need to first understand, accept, and then practice the following:

Thinking, just as everything else, is supposed to follow certain rules, if we are to think correctly. Sometimes we make mistakes in thinking. We jump to conclusions; we make unwarranted assumptions; we generalize. There is a subject that catalogues these mistakes, points them out so that we can recognize them in the future, and then explains the rules for avoiding mistakes. That subject is logic. **Logic is not psychology** [emp. mine]. It does not describe what people think about or how they usually reach conclusions; it describes how they

ought to think if they wish to reason correctly. It is more like arithmetic than history, for it explains the rules one must follow in order to reach correct conclusions, just as arithmetic explains the rules one must follow to arrive at correct answers.⁵⁴

Begging The Question

Love has, explicitly at least, left out the biblical teaching concerning Hell that his fellow brother and friend Fudge promulgates, but nevertheless implicitly includes such by fellowshipping him anyway. I wonder what Love will do if brother Fudge goes further with his heresy to allege that Heaven is not conscious nor unending bliss! I guess we will just have to take Bill's word for it that the doctrine of "Heaven" is "core gospel" while the doctrine of "Hell" is not (or perhaps place a call to Osburn at ACU to see if "Heaven/Hell" is on his list).

Equivocation

Throughout the book, Love equivocates on the definition of "the church," but like the others (Osburn, Weed, Allen, and Hughes) he regards the "Church of Christ" or "Churches of Christ" as merely another "tradition" or denomination, simply a part of a larger "Christendom church" formed by all the true-blue, sincere people with good attitudes found in each "tradition." He even includes as "the church" the Roman Catholic Denomination which actually teaches salvation by works of merit!⁵⁵ Of course, this erroneous doctrine⁵⁶ has been around for many years. Love never identifies who just might **not** be in the church, and he never gets around to defining exactly how one gets from the **outside** to the **inside** of the church. Love does discuss or quote enough from some modern preachers to make one think that, contrary to Osburn, that baptism might have to be for the remission of sins.⁵⁷ It is fortunate we today do not have to depend upon such brethren as to whether we have to be inside the Ark!

The Fallacy Of Missing Evidence

Perhaps the most prominent fallacies in the book are Love's: (1) obviously arbitrary reductionist choice in what constitutes his "core gospel," which *skews* his evidence in the first place, and (2) in his committing the **Hasty Generalization Fallacy**, which consists of drawing a conclusion or generalization about the preachers which he surveys from too small a sample of cases or from unrepresentative or

biased data. This flaw has to do with the **sufficiency** of the evidence. In his survey of only **some** preachers he only uses their **sermons**—and then only **some** of those! To add insult to illogicality, Love ends up extrapolating out from these few men to allege ridiculous conclusions about how anemic the preaching in the whole of the church in America had become:

The tradition which was just a degree or two off center in the beginning when extrapolated down four generations brought preaching in the Church of Christ to a point far away from the New Testament emphasis on the cross....Our preaching, outstanding in so many ways, had a large void at the center. The core gospel was missing.⁵⁸

Would you not like to ask brother Love: “If the alleged ‘core gospel’ was missing, then was anyone saved by ‘non-core’ preaching by all these brethren?” Just imagine if I were to similarly “test” New Hermeneutic preachers by a pet “core gospel” of: “If a man truly understands and believes the cross of Jesus Christ is the only way to be saved he will be militant in his being a good soldier of Christ when he preaches.”⁵⁹ Then I listen **only** to **some** sermons of **some** preachers and even then leaving out various other types of speaking formats such as their own homes, Christian camps, youth meetings, Bible classes, communion meditations, lectureships, personal Bible studies, radio and television, etc.⁶⁰ One thing for sure, with present-day New Hermeneutikers it would not take long to do this little survey! I would likely get more evidence or *feedback* from trying to find out how many militant “songs” they (quite inconsistently) have sung from our songbooks!

THE WORLDLY CHURCH

Though they more strongly mount an attack on the shallowness and materialism evidenced in liberal churches of Christ, some of which they describe as “little more than a social club with a religious veneer”; Allen, Hughes, and Weed follow comrades Osburn and Love in almost every way. This includes **Reductionism** in regard to what constitutes the “gospel,” and **equivocation** as to the meaning of “the church.”⁶¹ Ironically, while they are critical of *utility* becoming “the guiding principle of the church,”⁶² the Philosophy of Pragmatism once again rears its ugly head. “These are themes that must form the identity of Churches of Christ if we are to be taken seriously as a people of God in this world.”⁶³ After quoting Romans 8:37-39, note the

subtle “result oriented” philosophy implied in this following statement: “This is the gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ. It is this, and this alone, that enriches and **enlarges the flock of Christ** and gives us all a place to stand [emp. mine].”⁶⁴ The authors praise our change from following those brethren in the old days who “often nurtured a rigid, dogmatic, sectarian spirit and frequently held” themselves “aloof from the communities” in which they lived. If they mean the Lord’s church did not fellowship denominationalism, they are right, but in actuality they mean contextually that God’s people did not love and help the people in their communities—about which they are dead wrong!

Subtle criticisms of logic and reasoning properly occur throughout the volume,⁶⁵ perhaps most clearly informing us of their extreme epistemological bias in the following bibliographical entry: “Molnar, Thomas, *The Pagan Temptation: How Rationalistic Christianity Paves the Way for Paganism*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1987.”⁶⁶ Paralleling Osburn and Love, they attempt to psychoanalyze the 1800s through the purported impact of the Enlightenment and confuse Rationalism with rationality while implying their own agnosticism:

One of the earliest “needs” to capture the attention of American Christians was the “need” to defend God against the onslaughts of the rationalists and secularists in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Ironically, those defenders of the faith employed for this purpose the very assumptions of the rationalists they opposed. Armed with reason and logical proofs, they rushed to prove God’s existence in scientifically irrefutable ways....When they had finished, the infinite, transcendent, and sovereign God of the universe had all but disappeared. What was left was little more than the end product of a syllogism, void of mystery and power. This rational, demonstrable, and proven “god” was not the infinite and transcendent God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, but a domesticated and manageable god for a secular church in a secular age.⁶⁷

Jonathan Edwards is highly praised by the authors for his Calvinistic recognition of the sovereign power of God, and the authors shock the reader in their approval of the doctrine of the Total Depravity of mankind as follows: “The twentieth-century church has sacrificed...the biblical notions of sin and salvation. Our secular civilization argues that human beings are not inherently sinful.”⁶⁸

Once Again Anti-Militancy Makes New Hermeneutikers

Once more we can see that the real problem of the New Hermeneutic brethren is rooted in their **anti-militancy**, for these authors

actually blame liberal congregations which are nothing more than “Christ’s Clubs” on the “Old Hermeneutiker’s.” Along with Osburn and Love, they decry “the negativism, the sectarian divisiveness, the debating, and the argumentative spirit that...often dominated the church’s past.”⁶⁹ Though Osburn easily does a better job of explaining the details of such, these three authors also find our “salvation” from all of this in the Scholarship Movement, or what they describe as laboring “long and hard at the discipline of biblical theology” (in contrast to the Old Hermeneutic), wherein “we must attempt to discern the theological centers of Scripture, God’s decisive and mighty deeds that give everything else its significance and shape.”⁷⁰

Typically for those involved in the New Hermeneutic, the authors open themselves up to the same criticisms made of Osburn and Love above by their concluding from their anti-militancy prejudice and bias against rationality that the Old Hermeneutic has to go.

Such a reading of the Bible made it very difficult to distinguish the “weightier matters” from the less weighty ones, the central doctrines of the Bible from the subordinate ones. Scripture, we might say, became “flat,” that is, all its “facts” and commands became of “first importance.” Christian identity came to depend on getting them all right, or at least the ones we judged to be “binding.” Often enough, the result has been rancorous debate, division, and abiding animosity over what is central or peripheral, essential or nonessential.⁷¹

I agree with one thing Reuel Lemmons said in this volume’s preface: “Leonard Allen, Richard Hughes, and Michael Weed issue a call that we all need to hear.” Unfortunately we need to hear their call, along with that of Carroll Osburn’s and Bill Love’s, not in order to follow it by *denominationalizing* the pure Bride of Christ, but in order to warn brethren about and refute the New Hermeneutic concept of fellowship which will surely destroy the biblical identifying marks that she must possess.

ENDNOTES

¹Our liberal brethren are involved in this fallacy (or found *Begging The Question* and *Special Pleading* which will overlap into it) when they say things like “conversion must be to the Person of Jesus and not to a system,” “gospel, not doctrine,” “let’s not get off into golden-oldy lists from ‘restorationists’ of supposed sins, but rather of the most awesome thought I ever had—namely: ‘God is,’” “to be at one with the Father is the essence of the Christian quest,” “Jesus bound love in Mark 12:28 and John 13:34-35, not how many ‘issues’ are ‘nailed down,’” or “God is not really interested in your old, oppressive list from our sectarian past, but rather He looks at love for Him, and

sincere concern for other people, and at quality in personal and corporate lives.” The liberal will almost never take up item-by-item the things held by many of us to be matters of obligation in order to biblically demonstrate that they are really matters of option instead. And when he does occasionally attempt such, we are not usually allowed the privilege to biblically refute his error.

²Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom: Essays Favoring Non-Sectarian Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993); Bill Love, *The Core Gospel: On Restoring The Crux Of The Matter* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1992); C. Leonard Allen, Richard T. Hughes, and Michael R. Weed, *The Worldly Church: A Call For Biblical Renewal* (Abilene, TX: ACU Press, 1988). In addition to many other recent similar volumes written in a somewhat *guarded* popular vein for the average reader in the churches of Christ, I would urge brethren to read two volumes which were not published by our brethren and much less *guardedly* went out to the public at large to show their true colors: Richard T. Hughes and C. Leonard Allen, *Illusions Of Innocence: Protestant Primitivism In America, 1630-1875* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1988); Richard T. Hughes, ed., *The Primitive Church In The Modern World* (Urban, IL: University Of Chicago Press, 1995).

³These include such things as the fallacies of: (1) *equivocation* which occurs because some word or phrase (e.g., “evolution” or “the church”) is used either explicitly or implicitly in two different senses, (2) *presumption*, (3) *relevance*, (4) *weak induction*—including the *appeal to authority* (e.g., “true scientists or scholars maintain X”), *hasty generalization* (e.g., where samples chosen are not typical), *false cause* (e.g., *the fallacy of oversimplification/reductionism*), (5) *false dichotomy*, (6) *suppressed evidence*, (7) abusive *ad hominem* where the arguer uses pejorative terms to paint a person or a group as terrible persons, and (8) *composition*. In fact, one could easily write a logic textbook using the writings of New Hermeneutikers to illustrate the fallacy sections! I urge the reader to buy and carefully study a good volume on logic.

⁴Max Black, *Critical Thinking* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1952), p. 13.

⁵The last three points are owed to William Woodson.

⁶Gordon Clark, *Logic* (Jefferson, MD: The Trinity Foundation, 1985), p. ix.

⁷Osburn, p. 37.

⁸Clark, p. x. I urge every reader to purchase this book even if only to read the preface by Robbins. This volume is written especially for those who profess to be followers of Christ as is the one by Norman L. Geisler and Ronald M. Brooks, *Come, Let Us Reason* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1990).

⁹Black, p. 24.

¹⁰Monroe C. Beardsley, *Thinking Straight: Principle Of Reasoning For Readers And Writers* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1966), pp. 214-217.

¹¹I have paraphrased from two or three places from Osburn’s book with the last part almost word-for-word from page 70; cf., 51, 94, 137.

¹²Beardsley.

¹³Osburn’s statement (p. 63) about our “philosophical naiveté” would be hilarious if it were not so tragic in his own case. I have yet to meet in person or to read from any brother living (or dead) who claims, as per Osburn’s allegation, “the arrogant and delusive appropriation of ‘all truth’” which Osburn then says (51) “must be replaced with an ongoing quest for truth in a philosophically sound context.” If Carroll can produce the person or the text wherein a brother claimed to know “all truth,” I will pay

our learned professor \$25 and then proceed to prove to the newly discovered brother that he is **wrong** in claiming such omniscience. I rather think that the Professor is really upset over certain specific doctrines which brethren from the past claimed to know from Scripture, which today many of us still regard as obligatory. Of course, one must realize that it is impossible for the New Hermeneutikers themselves to be persons influenced by the culture around **them**; so it is regarded as “off-limits” or “non-irenic” to bring up (much less link them with) the pervading world views permeating our society, such as subjectivism, ecumenism, tolerance, and broadmindedness. Such *ad hominem* material is reserved to them alone so they can “psychoanalyze” and write “historical novels” explaining why faithful brethren believed as they did instead of facing up (as they should do) to the evidence presented from the Bible itself by these sound brethren for the positions they maintained.

For example, after equating good brethren in our past with those Pharisaic Jews who burdened people “with laborious rules and regulations,” which they “accumulated over the years” while fighting “against justice tooth-and-nail,” brother Osburn then says: “Mercy! It’s strange how witch-hunters and keepers-of-the-faith, modern-day counterparts of those who killed prophets years ago, do not like the word or the concept of mercy. But Jesus said that Mercy is a hallmark of the kingdom” (p. 135)! It is too bad that God would not see fit, as He did when our Lord died on the cross (Mat. 27:52-53), to raise up a few of our castigated pioneer preaching brethren with Bibles in hand to confront our ACU professor about these and other gross, un-biblical allegations as to their views and their motives! In his squeamishness he will not go “one-on-one” with any of us **alive today**, despite the fact that the One whom he claims as his Lord believed in such discussion on specific doctrinal issues! Most Bible Department professors in “our” schools remind me of “mouthy monks behind nice, safe cloistered walls! In at least one incident in the past where a debate was suggested, Osburn claimed he “could not think that quickly or well on his feet.” The bad news is that most of the time he rarely thinks well **anytime**—whether standing or sitting!

¹⁴Patrick J. Hurley, *A Concise Introduction To Logic* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Publishing, 1991), pp. 131-134. One of the best logic books available!

¹⁵Larry Siegle in an E-mail letter posted to the Challenge Discussion List overseen by Jerry D. McDonald, March 19, 1998.

¹⁶Typical of these Pragmatist-driven brethren, A.D. 70 advocate Siegle says: “The spirit of the Pharisees is still alive and well in the Lord’s church. The net effect of such attitudes is that of driving the wedges of division in even deeper. The ‘anti-everything’ congregations are going to wake up one day to discover nothing left before them except empty pews. There is no value in convert [sic] people to a ‘system’ when the Bible teaches that they must be converted to a person (Jesus Christ).” New Hermeneutikers thus practice the fallacy of Special Pleading in refusing to apply their own castigations against themselves. Funny, is it not, that being “converted to the person of Christ” can include vehement, disfellowshipping opposition to such things as cocaine use or partial-birth abortion, and quite obviously also includes the New Hermeneutic “system” of liberalism? Yet, one’s being converted to Christ’s person cannot possibly include “goring the liberal’s ox” of premillennialism, Realized Eschatology, marriage-divorce-remarriage, congregational organization, nor even with some (whose ‘circle of fellowship’ grows larger every week) the purpose of baptism. Parallel to the macroevolutionists’ situation with Creationism, New Hermeneutikers may differ with

their comrades over thousands of details, but the one thing they are agreed upon is that Old Hermeneutikers (cf., Creationist scientists) are wrong, that there is a “core gospel,” and that we ought not divide over the matters which Old Hermeneutikers in their (alleged) traditionalism have fussed, fought, and splintered over.

¹⁷When they cite remote context verses (e.g., Acts 10:34; Jam. 2:9), they have given up their own basic position against “our system” and in fact have joined us in such!

¹⁸I highly recommend the book edited by William Woodson, *The Church And Fellowship* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1974), especially the material by Gus Nichols, Thomas B. Warren, William Woodson, and G. K. Wallace. This material countermands the many assertions and even innuendoes regarding numerous faithful brethren made by Osburn, Love, Allen, Hughes, and Weed. Of course, so does the actual history of New Testament Christianity in America.

¹⁹William Woodson, “The Church And Fellowship,” pp. 52-59; Alan E. Highers, “The Teaching Of Christ,” *Studies In 1,2,3 John*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Publications, 1987), pp. 448-460; also see Tom Bright’s chapter in the same volume pp. 409-415.

²⁰After spending much ink trying to establish his **objective genitive** heresy, Osburn quite amazingly turns around in the rest of the chapter (and the next one) to falsify his own position in his realization that remote context demonstrates it to be incorrect!

²¹Osburn, p. 65.

²²This is surely a form of the pernicious agnosticism which Paul denigrated in his description of those “holding a form of godliness, but having denied the power thereof” (2 Tim. 3:5), which in Osburn’s case even includes his denial (64) of an infallible, inerrant Bible! Paul quite negatively described such agnostics as “ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth” and men who (however sincere) “withstand the truth. Men corrupted in mind, reprobate concerning the faith” (2 Tim. 3:7-8). As one studies Osburn’s volume, he observes that our Professor has quit “searching” and lays unique claim to the possession of this one truth: “The Old Traditionalist view of fellowship is WRONG and ought to be changed!”

²³Osburn quoting Harrell, p. 46.

²⁴*Ibid.*, pp. 4-5.

²⁵*Ibid.*, p. 91. Amazingly, Osburn does the same thing with Jude 3 (pp. 121-122)!

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 91.

²⁷*Ibid.*, p. 35.

²⁸*Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁹*Ibid.*, p. 65

³⁰*Ibid.*, p. 65. It is ironic that Osburn will sometimes give lip service to **logic** as when he mentions the pragmatism of “a loving appeal to reason” (92) in bringing about unity among believers. Unfortunately, in the same breath he ties “consensus” (I am sure he means among language scholars) as co-equal with “reason.” He goes on to reveal his own humanly deduced “ground rules”: “If, indeed, Christians would only teach their views fully and fairly, **but not divide the body** [emp. mine], doors would open for vigorous dialogue now closed due to sectarian spirit. Fellowship could be maintained.” (92). First, few liberals teach their views fully and fairly. It normally must be “dragged out of them” piece-meal. Second, many of us **have** opened doors for such “vigorous dialogue” (call it New Testament debating in emulation of Jesus) and have left those doors propped **wide open**, but nine out of ten liberals slam them shut by their adamant

refusal to debate their cause in a Christian forum! Third, unless one agrees beforehand that the issue discussed is not a matter of “fellowship” which will “divide the body,” then no “vigorous dialogue” is allowed. But why would we want to seriously debate an issue if we felt it did not matter to one’s soul in the first place? The jury has been “rigged”! Since they cannot debate faithful brothers who have died and will not debate those still alive on a “heaven-or-hell” (as viewed by us) issue, it should be obvious who has really “closed the door” on meaningful discussion.

³¹Ibid., p. 63. It is incredible that ACU allows Osburn to replace “verbal inspiration” with what he calls “full” inspiration (63).

³²In some places (51) Osburn sees this as an “attitude” which inevitably causes division. See Moses Lard, “Have We Not Become A Sect?” *Lard’s Quarterly* 1:3 (March, 1864), pp. 225-259. Instead of operating in the “hodge-podge” and equivocating fashion of New Hermeneutikers, Lard defines crucial terms and logically argues the case for a “**no**” answer.

³³Ibid., p. 129.

³⁴Let me here suggest that Dr. Osburn needs to “toss” much of F. F. Bruce’s comments (esp. on 2 John 9-11) and spend a little more time in the main text of John R. W. Stott’s *Christ The Controversialist*. Better yet, why not spend time studying Jesus Christ from the Scriptures themselves, including His view of whether or not they contain contradictions!

³⁵Osburn, pp. 130-131. He no doubt will claim that he **is** being respectful in his determined opposition to homosexuals, but that is also **our** answer concerning the issues and persons which **we** oppose.

³⁶Ibid., p. 132.

³⁷Ibid., p. 135.

³⁸Ibid., p. 136.

³⁹Ibid., p. 15. Cf., “Instead of playing a leading role in American religious thought, the Restoration Movement finds itself awash in the backwaters, while the mainstream of religious thought passes by with hardly a nod in our direction” (13). He is quick to point out that he personally is doing his part in the worldwide arena among Bible translators, leading scholars in Europe’s universities, inner-city relief workers, and Greek monasteries (v-vi). Cf., His “serious scholarship” comparison regarding Jude 3 (94).

⁴⁰Osburn clearly sides with Barton W. Stone’s *Christology* and “union of spirit” view as over against Campbell’s alleged *legalistic* or “exact conformity with primitive faith and doctrine” approach (38-40). The authors of all three books reviewed in this chapter would surely agree with Stone’s belief that “Whoever acknowledges the leading truths of christianity, and conforms his life to that acknowledgment, we esteem a christian” (38), a sort of “pious church within all the denominations” doctrine. But should we allow Osburn, Love, Allen, Weed, and Hughes (however “scholarly” they might be) to give us what essentially comes down to merely a **shorter** list of “fundamental scripture truths, and any explanation of them by fallible men” (39) since they are just as fallible as brethren who hold to a **longer** list of such?

⁴¹Ibid., p.45. In at least one place (137), Osburn seems to recognize his own vulnerability to a cultural countercharge by opponents to his “fresh definition of church from the biblical text for our age.” He says (137): “We need a spirit of tolerance, not because it is more comfortable or because of political correctness, but because it is

biblically mandated.” Now why is it that Osburn cannot at least grant the possibility that faithful brethren both past and present had a spirit of **intolerance** and oppose(d) hundreds of denominational errors **not** because it was culturally demanded in order to uphold the status quo in regard to fellowship (72), **nor** because of an arrogant attitude of Gnostic separation, **nor** from the desire “to eliminate from fellowship anyone with whom one disagrees” (73), but “because it was biblically mandated”?! Do liberals really have a *corner* on proper motivation?

⁴²Among other issues, the grace excludes law heresy, usually maintained by these same individuals, involves them in the same false bifurcation.

⁴³*Ibid.*, pp. 123-138.

⁴⁴*Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁴⁵*Ibid.*, p. 134

⁴⁶*Ibid.*, pp. 11, 91, 60-64.

⁴⁷*Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴⁸See the discussion between Fudge and Gary Workman in Dub McClish, *Studies In The Revelation* (Delight, AR: Valid Publications, 1984), pp. 475-508; cf., Ronnie Hayes, “The Denial Of Eternal Punishment Heresy,” *Shall We Restructure The Church Of Christ?*, ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Sain Publications, 1995), pp. 323-339.

⁴⁹Love, pp. 310-311.

⁵⁰*Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁵¹*Ibid.*, pp. 1, 74-75, 77, 79-80, 92, 128, 131-134, 136, 142, 150.

⁵²*Ibid.*, pp. 148, 160, 180-182, 194-197, 203, 207, 228-230, 234, 237, 239, 250.

⁵³*Ibid.*, pp. 129, 131, 255-256. Cf., Jimmy Clark, “*You Have Heard It Said, ‘We Are Committed To The Church Born Out Of The American Restoration Movement,’*” in *You Have Heard It Said...But The Bible Says*, ed. Bob McAnally (Lakeland, FL: Sain Publications, 1996), pp. 283-299; See my own comments in *Rightly Dividing The Word: Vol. II—Special Hermeneutics* (San Antonio, TX: Firm Foundation, 1991), pp. 342-343, 398; Cf., William Woodson, *Change Agents And The Churches Of Christ* (Athens, AL: School Of Bible Emphasis, 1994), pp. 49-89.

⁵⁴Robbins in Clark, p. vi.

⁵⁵Love, p. 83. Have we not heard from liberals this accusation against us Old Hermeneutikers? I guess it only counts as terrible sin if one is from “the Restorationist heritage.”

⁵⁶Eph. 2:12-13; 2 Cor. 5:17; Col. 1:14; 2 Tim. 2:10; 1 John 5:11; Eph. 1:3; Gal. 3:27; Rom. 6:3-4; Col. 2:12; Rom. 12:5; Col. 1:24; 1 Cor. 12:13, 27; Acts 2:47; 1 Pet. 3:21.

⁵⁷Love, pp. 244, 267-269, 278, 280-281.

⁵⁸*Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁵⁹In at least once instance, Love did quote a militant preacher (i.e., Stephen), but he was not a New Hereneutiker! Another “grid” could be each time the New Hermeneutic preacher stressed the value and necessity of the non-denominational church (e.g., Jesus’ kingdom parables, His promise to build His church, His delivery of His church unto the Father, etc.). As with Osburn, Love cannot resist subtle attacks as in: “Defenders of the faith were present with their notebooks and tape recorders” (37).

⁶⁰What is amazing here is that Love seems to recognize the fallacy he is committing, but he proceeds ahead to his pages of crowded fact and argument anyway (109-110).

⁶¹Allen, Hughes, Weed (hereinafter AHW), pp. 1-3, 6-7, 9-11, 25-26, 31, 35-36, 38-40, 48, 52, 54, 60. Though sometimes equivocating, AHW apparently intend the phrases "Church of Christ" and "our movement...our heritage" to mean "a denomination" while generally speaking "the church" as "Christendom" and "a community of the cross" which is made up of all sincere "believers" or "all the weary people of God."

⁶²Ibid., pp. 13, 17.

⁶³Ibid., p. 3, footnote #6 on p. 22, pp. 27-28, 34, 36-37, 56-60, 69, 74.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 48.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 3.

⁶⁶Ibid., p. 96.

⁶⁷Ibid., pp. 30, 33-38.

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 30.

⁶⁹Ibid., p. 37. Cf., "There is nothing left to do but defend the gains of the past," (31); "a rigorous message with the hard and ugly sectarian spirit that did incalculable damage to our movement for so many years," (2).

⁷⁰Ibid., p. 72.

⁷¹Ibid., p. 59.