

A Study of The Local Church
Lesson 6 - The Fellowship of a Christian
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Introduction: What does your relationship with God mean to you?

- A. If someone wants to be right with God he must put Him first. (**Matt 10:37-39**)
- B. When compromise is made in your loyalty to God, He calls it adultery.
 - 1. How would you like to “share” your mate with another?
 - 2. This is how God views our loyalty to Him. (**2 Cor 11:2-4**)
 - 3. The nation of Israel heard their adultery described. (**Jer 3:6-10**)
 - a. Judah in Josiah’s day was doing many good things outwardly. Why? Because they followed a good king, Josiah.
 - b. God said they were not true in their hearts. This is what God sees.

I. Two Kinds of Fellowship

- A. There is fellowship with God. (**1 John 1:1-3**)
 - 1. What is fellowship? Koinonia - Communion, fellowship, sharing in common...
 - 2. Fellowship always has an object! In this case it is fellowship with God!
 - 3. God dwells in us as Christians. We share in eternal life which is from God. (**Acts 2:38; 1 Cor 6:19-20**)
- B. There is our fellowship with other Christians. (**2 Cor 6:14; Gal 2:9; 1 Cor 12:23-27**)
 - 1. This relationship has its foundation in an underlying fellowship with God.
 - 2. Here we share with one another spiritual encouragement, we recognize one another as Christians, and we share together in things Christians are to do together.
 - 3. Consider the spiritual “fellowship” we have as Christians. (**Acts 2:42; 1 Cor 10:16-17, 21-22**)

II. The Biblical Bounds of Fellowship

- A. Before we extend fellowship to others as Christians, we must make a judgment as to whether they are faithful to God. (**1 John 1:5-7**)
 - 1. We need to ask: “Is this one a Christian?” (**Acts 9:26**)
 - 2. We also need to ask: “Is this one a faithful Christian?” (**1 John 3:4-10; Eph 5:11**)
 - 3. There are limits to this kind of judgment. We are not trying to take God’s place! (**1 Cor 4:2-4**)
 - 4. Why does this church exist? What is the primary reason for our relationship with one another? It is not the “restoration heritage” but the cross of Christ! (**Gal 6:14**)
 - 5. What is our attitude toward other brothers and sisters in Christ? Do we view them as “one for whom Christ died?” (**Rom 14:15, 20**)
- B. We can be wrong in our judgment.
 - 1. The Christians at Jerusalem were wrong at first about Paul. (**Acts 9:26**)

- a. They did discover their error and correct it! (**Acts 9:27-28**)
- b. We must never let the fear of: “We could be wrong”, keep us from doing what the Lord demands!
- 2. The church at Corinth refused, at first, to withdraw from one practicing sin. (**1 Cor 5:1-3**)
- C. There is a standard upon which fellowship is based.
 - 1. The New Testament is our standard. (**2 Thess 3:6, 14; Rom 16:17; 1 Jn 4:6**)
 - 2. Some have asked: “What is the doctrine of Christ?” (**2 John 9**)
 - 3. The doctrine of Christ is what Christ taught. (**John 12:48; Rev 2:14**)
- D. How do we extend fellowship?
 - 1. By recognizing and greeting one as a faithful brother. (**2 John 9-11**)
 - 2. By supporting one in their teaching. (**3 John 5-8**)
 - 3. By associating with one because they are right with God. (**1 Cor 5:9-11; 2 Thess 3:14-15**)

III. Views of Fellowship --- Then and Now

- A. In the 50’s and 60’s there was gradual acceptance of allowing men to come for meetings who had departed from basic Bible teachings.
 - 1. Often these men were attached to large sponsoring churches or “church colleges”. To many his gave them instant credibility.
 - 2. In the place these men worked they did not teach the things they believed publicly, but often spread these things in private. (**Jude 3-4**)
 - 3. In time these institutions were allowing these men to go unchecked.
- B. Today the Institutional churches have come to reap a harvest.
 - 1. Most of the large institutions have now completely fallen under the control of the “change agents.”
 - 2. Where the influence of these institutions was welded in the 50’s and 60’s to protect their support from church treasuries, this same power is being used today to push out “the Patternist.”
- C. Here is the current views of fellowship
 - 1. We can fellowship churches that use instruments of music.

“When I asked Buddy how he viewed the Christian Church, he floored me by boldly saying that he was in "FULL FELLOWSHIP WITH THEM." Since I couldn't believe what I had just heard, I asked him the second time, "You are in full fellowship with them?" Buddy said, "I feel that way."

Buddy Bell Returns To Montgomery, Alabama! - Ray Dutton, Seek the Old Paths

- 2. We can fellowship all believers in Christ, which includes the “mainline” denominations.”
 - a. Sometimes there is “open fellowship” in the exchanging of pulpits. (Ex. Max Lucado at a Baptist church: “When I see a believer, I see a brother.”)

b. Sometimes this “open fellowship” is done in “special meetings”.

“We express concern for our sister congregation, the Covington Road church in Natchez, in their recent decision to be involved with a Baptist denominational group known as "World Changers." Denominations are man-made institutions with earthly headquarters, manuals, organizations, plans of salvation, worships and works. They are not the church of the New Testament, as is evident from the Scriptures, and work contrary to the Truth of God...”

“...In receiving the Covington Road News bulletins and being informed of the coming of the "World Changers" to Natchez, one would consider them to be our Christian youth from churches across the country. They were not! They were Southern Baptist youth. The bulletins were deceptive in that this was never mentioned. It was through the local newspaper that we learned that the youth were Southern Baptists. The June issue of the bulletin says, "Let us plan, pray and work for this good effort...." (We acknowledge the work to be good work but the fellowship is unscriptural and sinful. We are to "have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness but rather reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). The following July bulletins state: "We encourage any -- especially our youth -- to be involved in this manual labor on behalf of others and to God's glory." "We look forward to this opportunity to serve the needs of others in our community: may God bless our efforts..."

- Covington Road Church Further Fractures Fellowship, Joe W. Nichols

c. Most of the colleges now support fellowship with the denominations.

In the current issue (online) of the New Wineskins, there is an article written by Dr. Gary Holloway who is “Associate Director of the Center for Spiritual Renewal” at Lipscomb University. The title of this article is “Circle of Fire: Barton Stone and a Spiritual Model of Unity.” In this article Dr. Holloway presents some views that Barton W. Stone had regarding unity among believers. Dr. Holloway stresses that unity is to be experienced based upon relationships and mission centered in Christ rather than upon agreement in biblical doctrine. He emphasizes that this is what appeals more to the younger generation. He also states that we should be willing to embrace in prayer, worship, and service all those who exhibit the fruit of the Spirit. In other words we should permit our denomination to merge into the body of Christ at large. Please read carefully the following remarks written by Dr. Holloway:

“My own experience teaching in a university where 70% of the students are from acappella Churches of Christ confirms this cultural shift away from the importance of denominational labels to a deep concern for relational and spiritual union. It is not unusual in a typical week for our students to attend a Monday night instrumental (!) praise worship at a local Church of Christ, a Tuesday night ecumenical teaching session at First Baptist downtown, Wednesday night at a fairly traditional Church of Christ, and Thursday

night Taize worship at a Presbyterian church – all before going home on the weekend to their parents' Church of Christ where many think we are the only Christians!"

It is sad indeed to sense the sarcasm in that last statement by Dr. Holloway. It is also alarming to know that our Christian young people are being encouraged by some faculty members of this Christian university where Dr. Holloway teaches to believe that the church is a denomination and that we can be united together with other denominations simply upon our relationship and joint efforts in missions done in the Spirit of Christ. ---
“To Whom Will You Entrust the Minds of your College Age Young People?” by Raymond Elliott

3. The only thing essential to salvation is the plan of salvation.

My first question for Buddy was "Who are the saved?" Buddy said that he felt that if he and I were teaching a non-Christian that our answers would be the same. He then stated to me that he believed that baptism was essential. I, then, asked him if a person could believe what the Baptists and Methodists teach about salvation and be saved. He did not answer YES or NO. He hedged by saying that he wasn't sure whether a person had to understand that baptism was for the remission of sins.

Since his answer troubled me, I asked him if he believed Baptists are SAVED. Again, he responded that he had a hard time answering that, and that he had some real mixed emotions about that. So I asked him if he considered them brothers and sisters in the Lord's fellowship. His answer: "Probably some I would."

Buddy Bell Returns To Montgomery, Alabama! - Ray Dutton, Seek the Old Paths

4. Many are swapping pulpits with denominations and giving up baptism as essential for salvation!

Max Lucado - Radio Station KJAK, Lubbock, Texas - December 1996:

Just turn your heart to him even right now as I am speaking. Call him your Father. And your Father will respond. Why don't you do that?

[Instrumental music playing in background] "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."

ANNOUNCER:

And friend, if you 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.....

Now Max Lacado returns with a special word for those who received the gift of salvation just moments ago in prayer.

MAX LUCADO [instrumental music playing in the background]:

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 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. [Transcribed from the tape].

IV. Arguments for a Broader Fellowship.

A. We cannot know if one is right or wrong on....

1. Some have asked me this: "Do you have all knowledge?" If I say No, then they follow: "How then can you be sure you are right about this?" My answer is: "I may not know ALL THINGS, but I do know SOME THINGS!"
2. Why do some people "not know?" (**Luke 10:29; Jn 3:19-21**)

B. Churches are stagnating, we will become extinct!

1. If this is so, let us then seek God's solutions.
2. Why do we exist? (**Gal 2:20**)

C. Because of bad personal experiences.

1. The most common cause of these departures is what I call "Reactionary Apostasy."
2. What is wrong with this thinking? (**Rom 3:4**)
3. Is it right to "get mad at the dog, and kick the cat?"

D. Because of a subjective view of how to know God's will.

1. Some have viewed themselves so close to God as to be above being challenged. These feel that they just know what God wants without looking at the scriptures.
This is pride! (**1 Cor 8:1-2**)
2. Others have let their desire to be with others cause them to "re-think fellowship."

E. Because we should be "tolerant!"

1. Who defines "tolerant", God or the current culture?

"But here it's important to remember what is meant by Tolerance" in a relativist society. It doesn't mean what used to mean: permitting each person the right to believe (or disbelieve) according to his own conscience. That would be a respect for religious freedom far too noble for a secular society bent on the eradication of religious faith. In sharp contrast, today's "tolerance" means having to accept all values, truths, and beliefs (no matter how morally bankrupt) as equally valid."

The Cultural Church, p. 78-79

V. Consequences of a Broader Fellowship

A. Fellowship in time will determine practice. (1 Cor 5:5-6)

1. This is not a new path! Consider again the experience of the “Disciples of Christ Denomination.”
2. Even if you “hold steadfast your views” what will become of your children?
3. Even now many country churches that have not had the slightest idea about what was occurring are now being influenced by the children and newcomers who attended the “Christian colleges” and large city churches. Many have found themselves in a minority on a very fast train.

B. The “openness” of today will become withdrawn in the future.

1. J. W. McGarvey learned a lesson the hard way in his “middle of the road” position on fellowship.
2. If you want to influence someone with God’s wisdom, take a stand!
(2 Cor 6:14-17)

C. God will view me as practicing the things that I encourage others in.

1. I will be held accountable! **(1 Tim 5:22; 2 John 9-11)**
2. What is my goal? Do I want others to change.

Conclusion: Who do I really want to have fellowship with?

A. While some say they want to be right with God, they in fact want to please men. (Gal 1:10)

1. While we may fool men, God knows our heart!
2. I have talked with men about what was right and what they needed to do. Even though they have agreed with me, I have often heard the refusal to stand rationalized like this: “It is hard to do what is right!”

B. What will heaven be like?

1. It will be filled with men of faith who at times had to stand alone.
(Heb 11:32-38)
2. Have you heard of these men?
 - a. Sethur? Gaddiel? Palti? Shaphat? Nahbi?
 - b. How about these men? Caleb? Joshua?

BEWARE!
By Stan Adams

We would use the term, We "watch out." The term speaks to the fact of impending peril, and issues warning, in order to avoid loss. It is used in Colossians 2:8 -"Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world and not after Christ." Again, we are warned by Christ in Matthew 7:15 -"Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly are ravening wolves."

In these two passages we are told to be careful and beware about what we are taught. We are warned that we can be led astray by those who appear to have our best interest at heart. Often, those we admire, can lead us into heresy and we may not even know it, because we are prejudiced by their good traits.

I have been a member of the church for 25 years and in a preacher's household for 37. I have watched and observed my father fret over having to deal with false teachers, I have watched him be demeaned, and be accused of lack of love because he stood his ground on Truth and would not back up. The observations of Christ and of Paul are very accurate and are still true. We should be ever aware of the possibility that we, or someone we love, may teach false doctrine and draw others away from their hope. In the time I have been a Christian. I have observed the tactics of false teachers, and have listened to sound brethren more seasoned than I am in their description of false teaching and its pattern.

Let us notice some attributes of false teaching.

False Teaching

1. *Often portrays itself as uncertain.* Error claims to be a learning process, but it never comes to a steadfast conclusion (**2 Tim. 3:7**). Error teaches by questioning, never takes a position that can be attributed definitely. It allows others to always wonder what the belief is.

2. *False teaching is often done by those who view themselves as the free-thinkers of the day (Acts 17:21).* In this passage we see the Athenians were forever interested in "some new thing." One who teaches false doctrine often sees himself as an innovator, one who rejects all the "traditional ideas," and is willing to mold for himself some new doctrine. Many of the young men I went to school with followed this pattern and are now in apostasy.

3. *False teaching is deceitful.* It does not advertise itself as dangerous and often on the surface seems innocent. When it is discovered for what it is and is challenged, it often goes underground until conditions are safe to surface again. Those who followed Holt, Ketcherside, and Fudge were told not to reveal what they believed all at once, but to keep people wondering and unsure. **Matthew 7:15** tells us that it appears as innocent as a lamb.

4. *False teaching turns people against one another.* It divides, shatters and splinters until a full path of destruction is laid. Then, sadly, there are some sad soldiers on the edges of the battlefield, who stand and wring their hands, and wonder what happened, and remember when someone admonished them to stand or be consumed, but it is too late!

5. *False teaching would like for every issue to be a "matter of judgment."* It would have you believe that vital issues that are matters of doctrine are minor points, and that "we all come out at the same place anyhow, so what is the big deal?" Does that sound to you like your Baptist friend, when spoken to about baptism? He will say, "We both believe in baptism, what difference does it make, whether or not it is for remission of sins?," The live-and-let-live philosophy is gendered by false teaching. Sympathizers with false teaching often are "milktoast" Christians who will not agree with the error, but will not take an active stand against it. This makes them a partaker of the evil deeds accomplished by false doctrine (**2 Jn. 9-11**).

6. *False teaching often portrays itself as being misunderstood.* "You didn't hear me right', or "I didn't mean it." We all know that as humans we will slip and misspeak, occasionally, but when we develop a pattern of telling folks we have been misunderstood, we are either involved in false teaching, or do not know what we are talking about, and ought to keep quiet and not advertise our doubts as doctrine. Much harm is done in the church because Christians get together to "study" and all that occurs is a mass pooling of ignorance, with everyone leaving more confused than when he came, but "feeling good," because we have "studied without the shackles of tradition."

All Christians should beware of false doctrine and be unafraid to oppose it. In order to do this we must be studious (2 Tim. 2:15). We must be aware of the tactics of error, and be unafraid as David was when he met Goliath. When error is espoused, it is a slap in the face of our Savior, who died to bring us salvation and hope, not confusion and uncertainty. That should make us upset! I have never been accused of liking a fight. I have always done what I could to avoid one, but that does not mean indignation cannot come to the front when Truth is challenged. Beware! and put your armor on! (**Eph. 6:10-18**).