

Our Fellowship With God

Introduction. Although “fellowship” is a New Testament word, it is often misused, and its misuse produces tremendous differences of conviction among the saints.

There are several factors contributing to the need for this study. The first factor is a continuing thirst for unity among all churches everywhere because of despair over division. The second factor is unfamiliarity, especially in younger members, with the subjects that have caused division among the saints in the past. The third factor is the increasing contact with groups whose practice differs from “ours” but whose principles appear to be quite similar to “ours.” The final factor is the rationalistic approach to all truth — especially spiritual truth. Rationalism makes truth relative, and anytime we make truth relative we deny that it is absolute.

I. Fellowship Defined

- A. The essential meaning of all the words translated “fellowship” is “association, communion, or joint participation.” It is something we share or something in which we have become a partner.
- B. Several examples will adequately demonstrate how the New Testament uses this word (Acts 2:42; Romans 15:26; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 10:16; Philipians 4:15; 1 Timothy 5:22; Hebrews 10:33).
- C. There are two senses of the word communicated in these usages
 1. Fellowship is a relationship that only God can extend or deny.
 2. Fellowship is an area in which man must exercise control. It is a partnership extended by man either within a local congregation or on an individual basis.

II. How Fellowship Is Accomplished

- A. Man was created in the image of God and was able to reflect the glory of that righteous state, but because of sin he was separated from God (Isaiah 59:1-2), and therefore no longer a partner with God.
- B. Because of this separation, man is unable to restore his fellowship with God (Isaiah 64:6). Provision for fellowship with God is solely of God (2 Peter 1:3).
- C. While yet in sin, God manifested His grace for us (John 3:16; Romans 5:8). For man, while being “servants of sin,” the gospel of Christ, predicated on what the apostles saw, heard, and declared (1 John 1:3), is heard. This opens the eyes and turns men from darkness to light (Acts 26:17-18).
 1. The sinner is freed from the consequences of sin when he obeys from the heart God’s way of salvation (Romans 1:16-17; 6:17-18).

2. Obeying the gospel allows someone to escape “the corruption that is in the world through lust” and become a “partaker” of the divine nature (2 Peter 1:4).
3. Continued fellowship with the Father depends on walking in the light (1 John 1:5-7). This is a habitual course of action that will be followed for the rest of one’s life (Revelation 2:10).

III. Our Fellowship With Each Other

- A. When a person becomes a baptized believer, God adds that person to the body of saved individuals.
 1. Every person who has fellowship with God will have fellowship with others who have fellowship with God (Acts 2:41-47).
 2. It is now their responsibility to make and maintain fellowship with other baptized believers who meet in a specific location (Acts 9:27-28).
 3. The local church is the functioning body of the universal church. Because there is no universal church assembly, the only way a Christian can perform what God requires is to do so in the company of other Christians.
- B. Just as our fellowship with the Father depends our walking in the light, our fellowship with each other depends on our walking in the light in several respects.
 1. We walk worthy of our calling (Ephesians 4:1-6).
 2. We walk in love with each other (Ephesians 5:1-2).
 3. We care for each other’s interests (Philippians 2:1-4).
 4. We do everything without murmuring or disputing (Philippians 2:14).
- C. Unity can be maintained within a local congregation even when some members hold different convictions.
 1. Paul, in Romans 14 and 1 Corinthians 8, taught that there are matters which God has not legislated. In these narrow areas, we can have differing convictions and not break fellowship.
 2. If these convictions are of a private, conscientious nature, and do not involve congregational actions, then others in that congregation may be at peace without violating their own private convictions.

IV. Areas In Which We Cannot Have Fellowship

- A. Fellowship is not extended to those who have not obeyed the gospel of Christ.
 1. The people of God have been delivered from the power of darkness (Colossians 1:13), and have become children of light (Ephesians 5:8).

2. Therefore, there is no partnership between light and darkness, or the people of the Lord and the people of the devil (2 Corinthians 6:14-18).
 3. If this were not the case, we could become partakers with Muslims, Catholics, Jehovah's Witnesses, Methodists, or any other religious organization. In fact, it would be wrong to withhold fellowship (John 17:20-21).
- B. Fellowship is not extended to baptized believers who are involved in sin.
1. Teaching error (Romans 16:17-18; Galatians 1:6-9; Titus 3:10-11).
 - a) Those who teach and push divisive doctrines cannot be fellowshiped.
 - b) This is difficult, especially among brethren whom we have considered friends. But our responsibility is to walk in the light.
 2. Practicing error (1 Corinthians 5:5; Ephesians 5:11; 2 Thessalonians 3:6, 14).
 - a) We cannot fellowship the immoral and those who refuse to conduct themselves righteously.
 - (1) Those who do not walk in the truth have no fellowship with the Father, nor do they have fellowship with the people of God who are walking in the light (1 John 2:19).
 - (2) Why would we want fellowship with someone who has no fellowship with God? Those who have left the truth should be "marked" and "avoided" rather than fellowshiped (Romans 16:17-18).
 - b) Furthermore, when congregational participation is necessary, every member of that congregation becomes involved via their joint participation.
 - (1) Care always has to be exercised. Just because a group identifies themselves as "church of Christ" does not mean that they are collectively adhering to the principles of truth.
 - (2) For example, we could not have fellowship with churches that use instrumental music or that support human institutions because we know authority does not exist in the Bible for those practices.
 3. Endorsing error in others (2 John 9-11).
 - a) We cannot bring into our association those who teach false doctrine then send them away and endorse their false teaching.
 - b) The people who commit sin are worthy of death, but Paul goes the extra step by proclaiming condemnation for those who "have pleasure in them that do them" (Romans 1:32).

Conclusion. Fellowship is something all true followers of Christ want to maintain. Christians have to do everything they can to prevent division and preserve the unity of the Spirit (Ephesians 4:2-3). We are calling you through teaching the gospel plan of salvation into the fellowship of Christ. We are also exhorting you to repent of sins if your fellowship with God has been compromised through sin.