

The Ground of Our Fellowship

I have made stands that some would consider bold, maybe courageous. I am honored and humbled that admiration would be given because I stand against sin. In all honesty, it is not difficult to accept admiration from godly peers even though it means stirring the ire of the wicked. Like a red badge of courage we look at the rejection from the world as confirmation of our right direction. The Word of God says, *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them"* (Ephesians 5:11). Love the sinner, hate the sin.

In recent days, however, my heart has become burdened as I have witnessed, and in some instances, borne the brunt of attack from people where I have preached. I have even received warnings from many a well-intended brother not to preach for this one or only preach for that one. I have even been told that if I preach for that one that I will not receive an invitation to preach for this one. In some cases I have been asked, in essence, to drop lifetime friendships to win the favor of those who call themselves the true fundamentalists. The term fundamentalist in the Christian sector became popular for the orthodox Christian just after the turn of the twentieth century as a backlash against higher criticism that questioned creation, Biblical inspiration, the deity of Christ, atonement through our Lord's efficacious shed blood, bodily resurrection, and the promise of Christ's return. These are doctrines that we hold dear. Men like R.A. Torrey, B. H. Carrol, G. Gresham Machen, Billy Sunday, Bob Jones, Sr., George W. Truett, M.R. DeHann, John R. Rice, and J. Frank Norris championed the faith in those early days of twentieth century Christianity. The list could go on, but I dare say I have already listed one or more that has angered someone reading this because even among these greats you have already sat in judgment and categorized one or more a heretic. The intent of defining ourselves as fundamentalists was to define the immoveable doctrines that we would die for; separate us from the apostate, while at the same time serve as an alignment of fellowship that would unify the believers. In years gone by, our similarities served us well in united campaigns, citywide revivals, Bible conferences, youth meetings, and a united front against evil and immorality, such as the days of prohibition.

To paraphrase a quote from the late Vance Havner, it is as though we are living in an insane asylum run by the inmates. Yes, it has gotten to be a little crazy out here in the work of God. For our dear membership and true friends, allow me to take a few moments and discuss the ground of our fellowship.

1. I will fellowship with those who are saved and love the Lord Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, *"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. And the glory which thou gavest me I have given them; that they may be one, even as we are one"* (John 17:20-22).

"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" (I John 4:2,3).

"Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity.. Amen"
(Ephesians 6:24).

"I am a companion of all them that fear thee, and of them that keep thy precepts" (Psalm 119:3).

2. I will fellowship with those who are straight on the fundamentals, even though they may be weak in the finer details.

Paul said it like this: *"Him that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations"* (Romans 14:1). We receive a brother not just so we may argue and dispute, but rather share

and enlighten. We have become so isolated that we may be guilty of in-breeding spiritually, producing freaks rather than God's peculiar people (I Peter 2:9). If I have not trained our membership to be able to answer the questions regarding what they believe, then shame on me. Actually, differences of opinion can be used to sharpen the belief that we have (Proverbs 27:17). If we only fellowship those who see eye to eye with us, sooner or later our fellowship will narrow down to less than "just us four and no more," eventually narrowing ourselves down to just ourselves. Even then, our fellowship will be restricted because I still have problems with me.

We will not bring a brother from the error of his way by isolation and rejection. A good example of this is found in the discipleship of Apollos: *"And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue: whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly"* (Acts 18:24-26).

3. We should not wish for evil upon another believer.

"He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad" (Matthew 12:30). It upset the disciples of Jesus when they saw the miracles of our Lord operating through other fellowships. Notice His response: *"And John answered him, saying, Master, we saw one casting out devils in thy name, and he followeth not us: and we forbid him, because he followeth not us. 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 9:38, 39). Jesus nicknamed James and John, Boanerges, which means, "sons of thunder." Biblical scholarship says, "The name seems to denote fiery and destructive zeal that may be likened to a thunder storm." How we need our Lord to calm our waves of angst against the brethren. Again, our Lord said, *"I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and am known of mine. As the Father knoweth me, even so know I the Father: and I lay down my life for the sheep. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd"* (John 10:14, 15).

"Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!" (Psalm 133:1). *"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death"* (I John 3:14).

We have discussed the firm ground of our fellowship; next week I want to talk about the epicenter that produces shaky ground for fellowship. Until then, keep in mind these words: *"Let brotherly love continue"* (Hebrews 13:1).

- Pastor Pope -

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