

## The Restriction of Our Fellowship

Last week we discussed the ground of our fellowship. We talked about defining qualities that link us together. This week I want to discuss those differences that would restrict our fellowship together. The Apostle said in I John 1:3, *"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."* The word fellowship comes to us from the Greek word: *koinonia*, which means fellowship; association; community; communion; joint participation. The English definition is: companionship; friendly association; a mutual sharing, as of experience, activity, interest, etc.; a group of people with the same interests; company; brotherhood. A homely but concise way of remembering what fellowship means is to think of two fellows in the same ship, going in the same direction, for the same purpose, and under the same command, with orders from the same Captain.

### **1. We will not fellowship with those who have openly rejected Christ and have no intention on converting.**

In obeying the Great Commission to evangelism, we must communicate the gospel and, to some degree, be acquainted with the people with whom we desire to win. The Bible, however, warns us not to become intimate with those who belong to the household of unbelief. *"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?"* (II Corinthians 6:14,15). The picture God gives is of two animals such as a donkey and an ox, both beasts of burden, but different strides, steps, and work ethic. The one will neutralize the effect of the other. *"Thou shalt not plow with an ox and an ass together"* (Deuteronomy 22:10). This is why I have, for these many years as pastor, been unable to knowingly perform the wedding ceremony of one of the converted youth of our church to an unbeliever. The union will have two fathers.

### **2. We will not fellowship with apostates.**

An apostate is one who comes to the truth and, just short of embracing the truth in salvation, departs and evangelizes against the truth that promises to free (John 8:32). Paul gives a description in II Timothy 3:5-7: *"Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth."* Peter warned of the apostate with these words in II Peter 2:21,22: *"For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them. But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire."* With the fear of God, Paul speaks of this company in Romans 1:32, *"Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them."* In Jude's brief but powerful epistle he forcefully defined the apostate by making the contrast in Jude 3 and 4: *"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. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ."*

When even so-called Christians deny the tenants of "the faith which was once delivered," we must break fellowship. We are not going in the same direction; we are not following orders from the same Captain. *"They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us"* (I John 2:19).

### **3. We will not fellowship with those who embrace an immoral lifestyle.**

The Bible says, "*Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners*" (I Corinthians 15:33). The word translated "communications" is also translated "companionships." Thayer defines "manners" as customary state, morals, and character. Therefore, according to the Word, if we keep company with evil working people we have the tendency to become like them rather than they to become like us. This is why Paul went on to say, "*Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you*" (II Corinthians 6:17). "*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*" (I Corinthians 5:11).

I have more to say, but I shall have to finish next week as I write my final plea to my "band of brothers."

- Pastor Pope -

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