

Scriptural Fellowship

Introduction. Discussions about the proper bounds of fellowship goes back to Bible times. It has been a much discussed throughout history. Fellowship continued to be a topic of much interest during early efforts to restore the New Testament faith in this country. The limits of fellowship was tested in controversies over use of instrumental music and missionary societies. It again was tested with institutional controversy and will continued to be contested throughout the history of the Lord's church when brethren are determined not to "*hold fast to the form of sound words*" (2 Timothy 1:13).

I. ***The Biblical Definition Of "Fellowship"***

A. The definitions of the word "fellowship."

1. "Fellowship" (*koinonia*).
 - a) The word is used of an association or close relationship between people.
 - b) The word also refers to generosity, a gift or the act of sharing in something.
2. "To share" or "give a share" (*koinoneo*).
3. "Partner, companion, sharer" (*koinonos*).
4. "Joint" participation.
5. Fellowship, then, is the state, condition or quality of persons (or things personified) being companions, partners or sharers together in some action, benefit or relation which is common to all the participants.
 - a) The term is not limited in its use to some single relation, arrangement or function. It may be used to describe many relations of both individuals and groups of individuals in different arrangements and functions.
 - b) However, notwithstanding its variety of uses, it always retains the basic meaning of a common sharing together, a joint participation as partners in whatever is being considered.
6. To have joint participation with someone of itself does not prove anything as to the rightness of that joint participation, endorsement or the like.
 - a) Two men may be at opposite ends of an issue and "jointly participate" in debating their differences. It does not mean they are in fellowship with one another for there is certainly no joint approval nor acceptance of each other.
 - b) The fellowship we are most interested in examining is a working together, mutual acceptance, approval and a harmony and unity as we serve God. Furthermore, there are rules about how this fellowship is established, how it is maintained and under what

conditions we may accept disagreement without its affecting fellowship between brethren.

B. Uses in the Septuagint (LXX).

1. Leviticus 6:2 -- "*fellowship*" -- refers to something held in common; pledge.
2. Job 34:8 -- "*goeth in company with ...*" -- suggests an association of implied approval.
3. Proverbs 28:24 -- "*companion of destroyer*" -- this denotes being a partaker with an ungodly man.
4. 2 Chronicles 20:35 -- "*joined*" -- they entered an alliance.

C. General uses in the New Testament.

1. Hebrews 2:14 -- reference to sharing in humanity.
2. Luke 5:10 -- denoting those who were "partners" in fishing.
3. Matthew 23:30 -- likeness between the Pharisees and the prophet's killers.
4. In each case, "*fellowship*" denotes association based on common goals and in common action.

D. Attempts to redefine fellowship.

1. Some say we need not agree on doctrinal principles to have fellowship with each other.
2. Some say we may have fellowship in areas where we act together without endorsing all.
3. Some have defined "*fellowship*" as dealing solely with action in a local church.
4. Some now use the term "association" to avoid a defense of "*fellowship*" per the Bible usage, yet defend actions involved in "*fellowship.*"

II. ***The Use Of The Term In The Spiritual Association Of Believers***

A. An illustration of fellowship (2 Corinthians 6:14-16).

1. Yoked -- implies a common work.
2. Fellowship -- denotes a "share" in action.
3. Communion -- normal word for "*fellowship.*"
4. Concord -- implies harmony of thought.
5. Portion -- having a part together with others.
6. Agreement -- a union of purpose.
7. Hence, agreement in principle leading to joint or common action in spiritual work.

B. Common principles and actions (2 Corinthians 6:17-7:1).

1. Holiness is taught by God. We must be cleansed and separated from sin.
 - a) Romans 1:32.
 - b) Revelation 18:1-5.

2. Is there a common principle and action of saints to sin? No! We must maintain holiness and come out of sin!
 3. Is there any lesson for us in the acceptance or tolerance for sin and error?
- C. Fellowship in the broader context of the Bible.
1. Ephesians 5:11.
 2. 2 John 9-11.
 3. 1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18.
 4. Jude 3-4.
 5. Throughout the Bible:
 - a) In the Old or New Testament, there is no case of instruction to receive teachers of error.
 - b) In the Old or New Testament, there is no case of instruction to receive practice of sin.
 - c) In the Old or New Testament, there is no case of instruction to receive diversity of morals.
 - d) In the Old or New Testament, there is no case of instruction to receive doctrinal diversity.
 - e) Whether in the Old Testament or the New Testament, God's people were always told to correct their doctrinal or moral problems.
- D. New Testament examples of fellowship.
1. Fellowship in suffering (Philippians 3:10; 1 Peter 4:12-13; Hebrews 10:32-33).
 2. Fellowship in benevolence (Romans 15:25-27; 2 Corinthians 8:1-5; 9:12-14).
 3. Fellowship in preaching the gospel (Philippians 1:3-7; 4:14-16; Galatians 6:6).
- E. Condemned fellowship.
1. 1 Corinthians 10:14-21.
 - a) We are not to commune with idolatry in thought or action.
 - b) The communion of believers is with Christ.
 2. 1 Timothy 5:22.
 - a) We cannot be partakers of other men's sins.
 - b) In this way, we will keep ourselves pure.
 3. 2 John 9-11.
 - a) The one going beyond the doctrine of Christ is condemned.
 - b) The one not bringing the doctrine of Christ is condemned.
 - c) The one aiding the erring teacher is condemned.

Conclusion. As we contemplate the subject of fellowship, we need to keep in mind that the issue is not being longsuffering to reach the sinner. We must be longsuffering to all (1 Thessalonians 5:14). The issue is not should

we love the sinner. We must love all men (Matthew 5:43-48; 1 Thessalonians 3:12). The issue is not the tolerance and the permitting of differing levels of growth. We all recognize that there are differing levels of growth (1 Peter 2:2; Hebrews 5:12-14; Colossians 1:9-11). We also must keep in mind that fellowship does not preclude every difference. If no inherent sin exists, we may "*receive*" one another. Paul explains this point extensively in Romans 14, which will be the subject of our next article.

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