



Conducted by
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FELLOWSHIP

IF you recall, we said that the subject of Fellowship was so important that we needed to look at it separately: this is what we shall now do, and we shall concentrate on those aspects of the subject which seem to cause most concern.

What is Fellowship?

The Greek word used in the N.T. is KOINONIA and it has the meaning of 'joint participation' 'communion', joint sharing. Some have used the definite article with the word fellowship and so have said that 'the fellowship' means the Breaking of Bread service; others have said that the collection of the saints is 'the fellowship'. Certainly, both of these ideas have the element of joint sharing and participation, but I am persuaded that fellowship, even though containing these elements, is more fundamental than these, and indeed, is complementary to them.

John records, "But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanseth us from all sin" (1 John 1:7). I believe that the realisation of our relationship with God through Christ is fundamental to our understanding of the nature of fellowship between fellow christians. Perhaps we have been hypercritical of the relationships that we have with each other without realising that such relationship should be extensions of the primary relationship that we have with God through Christ.

Walking in the Light

Christians are those people who are walking in the Light and who have fellowship with others who are walking in the same light. Jesus said of himself, "I am the light of the world", and it is John in his gospel record who tells us why in the final analysis many will be condemned by God, "For light has come into the world and men have loved darkness rather than light because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19).

Jesus is the light, and when we accept him as Saviour then we come to the light. We are not afraid of the illuminating power of the goodness of God because we know that we have willingly forsaken darkness and have preferred the benign glow of the true light from heaven. Our fellowship with God can be complete, but only in Christ Jesus His Son. Commenting on this in his first letter to Corinth Paul said, "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Christ Jesus our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9).

Now taking this a stage further we can see that the primary fellowship which each christian has is with God and Christ. This primary fellowship which each individual christian has with Christ is extended into a fellowship with other individual christians who are also 'in Christ'. God's love has called us through Christ. We love Jesus because he died for our sins and brought us into the glorious fellowship of himself and the Father. The plain fact of the matter is that we have to learn to love each other once having entered this fellowship. This is the burden of much of the N.T. teaching. The principal point which I want to impress upon your minds is that whatever fellowship we enjoy in the brotherhood is the necessary outcome of our fellowship with the Father and the Son. This is why, for instance, the Word teaches us that before we can contribute anything in any way we must first give ourselves to the Lord. This is also why John records, "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" (1 John 1:3).

COMMON GROUND

The Christian has been made a partaker of the divine nature, and if we continue to walk in the light I believe that fellowship with God and Christ will be full and complete. It is we who break the fellowship by drawing ourselves away from Christ. The Word of God is the common ground, and I believe that fellowship with the Father and the Son is impaired when that Word is ignored or mal-treated.

The question is often asked, "Why do you have no fellowship with members of other religious groups?" The answer is, of course, that they have precluded a real fellowship by denying, in fundamental terms, the revealed will of God. What do I mean by the phrase 'in fundamental terms?' Well, let us enumerate some of the things which separate:

- Titular heads of religious groups
- Infant sprinkling in place of immersion
- Denial of the sovereignty of the Lord
- Denial of the Sonship of Jesus
- Systems of church government other than that revealed in the N.T.
- A separate priesthood and ministry
- Periodic remembrance of the Lord instead of every first day of the week
- Hierarchical systems which have outgrown what God intended
- Women usurping authority over men
- Dubious fund-raising schemes

These are only some of the major errors of doctrine which serve to disallow true and complete fellowship between ourselves and other religious groups. The list is almost endless. I assert that such errors are fundamentally opposed to the Christian doctrine and as such cannot receive the blessings of God and Christ. They deny the very fellowship with the Father and the Son that some say they have. In such circumstances it is difficult to understand how we can have true fellowship when the common ground has been destroyed. The tragedy, so far as I am concerned, is that many fine and sincere people are caught up in such systems as I have stated, and my advice to them would be to do as the Bereans of old did; search the scriptures to see if the things you have believed are so.

What about the Church of Christ?

Someone will then say to me, "Are all the practices in the Churches of Christ absolutely uniform?" My answer to that would be, 'No, they are not'. But having said that, I would also say that I am not aware of any practice which would fundamentally deny the Father and the Son and exclude the participants from fellowship with them. If this is true, then it would be quite wrong of any other child of God to deny fellowship. The plain fact of the matter is this: if I deny fellowship to any of my brethren then theoretically I am saying that they are no longer children of God. I have sat in judgement on them and I have passed sentence that they are no longer fit to have communion with me. In fact, I am saying that with the absolute knowledge of right and wrong which I have, it becomes unnecessary to have a God at all.

I am deeply conscious of the fact that what I am saying may offend some of my brethren, but this is a cross I shall no doubt have to bear. All I ask is that we should examine the logic of the argument and dispense with the illogical.

It is illogical to assume that simply because money comes from America to support work here, that such money must be evil in source and use.

It is illogical to assume that all full-time workers who come from America to Britain have come here to subvert the British brethren.

It is illogical to say that if I use one container at the Lord's supper that I can have fellowship with brethren who use two, three or four, but that I can have no fellowship with those who use more.

It is illogical to agree only with those who may happen to agree with me at given moment in time, I have believed some of these things in the past but I have learned that fellowship with the Father, the Son, and with my brethren is to be prized more than that.

The Glittering Prize

Let us turn our attention to the Lord Jesus and his Church. The Lord purchased the Church with his own precious blood. HE intended that it should be a glorious church, without spot and blemish. When I think of my Saviour hanging there on the tree for my sins I know that in the new life he came to bring he had the conception of a glorious fellowship that I should enter into.

What happiness joint participation with Christ brings! Do we dwell sufficiently on the great privilege that is ours in Christ? We can live with him. We can hasten the day of his glorious return. We can hammer nails into the coffin of Satan. We can have the blessing of a unique and expanding fellowship. Why do we not grasp this glittering prize and demonstrate to the world what a truly united Church can hold forth in true love and fellowship. My fervent prayer is that we shall resolve to do this.

(All questions please to brother Alf Marsden, 377 Billinge Road, Highfield, Wigan).