

Contending FOR THE Faith™

FOR THOSE WHO LOVE THE TRUTH AND HATE ERROR

FELLOWSHIP WITH ONE ANOTHER

W. L. Totty

Fellowship is a question about which many people in the church throughout the country have become especially concerned. Just recently, I have received a request from one out of the city to write some comments on this subject.

Some teach that we must fellowship every person who is a believer in Christ, regardless of what he may teach or practice, while others disregard the teaching of the Lord by binding where the Lord has not bound. But those who know and respect God's Word will be content with the teaching of the New Testament and turn not to the right nor to the left.

The apostle John said, **"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). That is, those who are cleansed by the blood of Christ Jesus have fellowship as long as they walk in the light. Walking **"in the light"** means walking according to the teaching of the New Testament. All who walk after the teaching of the New Testament have fellowship one with another, whether they even know each other or not. Christian fellowship means working together for the cause of Christ as God commands. When a child of God refuses to walk according to the light, he then disfellowships himself from all who are walking in the light.

Paul, writing to the church at Thessalonica, said,

And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother (2 The. 3:14-15).

"Any man" refers to anyone who is a member of the church. The command to **"have no company with him"** does not mean to shun him in a social sense to the extent that one would not even speak to him, but, rather, not to fellowship him in the worship and service of the Lord. The apostle says definitely not to count him **"as any enemy"** but to **"admonish him as a brother."** If we cannot speak to him, we cannot **"admonish him as a brother."** That has reference to a member of the church of the Lord who will not abide by the teaching of Christ.

The same apostle, in his letter to the churches of Galatia, wrote, **"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"** (Gal. 6:1). Thus, we see that if a child of God is overtaken in a fault (which means disobeying the Lord in any respect, whether in teaching or in practice), we who are Christians should admonish such an one to repent of his evil and thus be restored to fellowship. We are to do that in the spirit of meekness, not with a self-righteous attitude that we could do no wrong. We are to consider ourselves, lest we should also be tempted.

Jesus said to His disciples, **"Take heed to yourselves: If thy brother trespass against thee, rebuke him; and if he repent, forgive him"** (Luke 17:3). That teaches us clearly that we are to make an effort to restore a person to

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Contending FOR THE Faith™

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repentance; and if he repents, then we forgive him and hold no grudge nor wait till such an occasion arises that we can retaliate, as some are disposed to do. Christ teaches plainly that we are to rebuke the one who sins against us. This should be done personally between the two, not telling everybody else about it.

Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican (Mat. 18:15-17).

After one has done according to that which the Lord commands and the man refuses to repent, he should not be fellowshipped by the church. Those are the words of the Lord Jesus Christ. The influence of Satan is different. His encouragement is to talk to everybody else about the brother's fault and craftily arouse resentment against him among the whole congregation before he is aware of it. Nobody should want to be like Absalom who sat at the gate and stole the hearts of the people when he sought to depose his father and take the kingdom for himself (2 Sam. 15:6).

Note that Jesus said, **"If thy brother trespass against thee..."** One must be careful not to build up a case against his brother because one does not like his personality, or maybe some of his little idiosyncrasies irritate one. If one does not sin against another, there is no justification for disfellowshipping him. Surely there is no person whose personality would exactly please everyone at all times. Even Jesus did not please everybody. We must beware of the temptations of Satan and follow always the words of the Lord.

Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God: And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone: In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit (Eph. 2:19-22).

The church is the body of Christ; and Paul said,

For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body: so also is Christ. For by one

Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit (1 Cor. 12:12-13).

Jesus is the “**chief corner stone.**” He is also the “**head**” of the church (Eph.1:22). By His being the head, we understand that He is the director; He gives the instructions to the church; and every member must listen to the head and do as the head directs. The church cost Jesus His blood.

The apostle Peter, writing about the members of the church, said, “**Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ**” (1 Pet. 2:5). Every member is likened unto a stone which would be used to build a house; and Peter said we are “**lively**” stones; that is, we must be alive to the commands of God, ready to do what He says. God has added us to the church, and Paul says that the members are “**fitly framed together.**” Therefore, we understand that a member must conform to the commands of the head, else he will not fit together with those who are obeying the commands of God and cannot be fellowshiped.

The church is composed of individuals grouped together in congregations throughout the world which makes it convenient for Christians in all nations everywhere to worship the Lord according to His word. Just as every member must follow the instructions of the head, so must every congregation follow the direction of the head. The church is called the body of Christ. All the members of the physical body must act according to the mind, or head, of the body. We can imagine the chaos of the human body if every member of the body tried to act upon its own direction and not according to the direction of the mind, or head. Just so it would be with the church if every congregation wanted to walk according to its own reasoning and ignore the instructions from the head.

Paul reminded the elders of the church at Ephesus that, when he left, grievous wolves would enter in among them, not sparing the flock, and that from their own midst would men arise, teaching perverse things, and draw away disciples after them (Acts 20:28); therefore, he instructed them to watch. He reminded them that he had warned them day and night with tears for three years about such things. Jesus Christ, while He was upon earth, instructed His disciples to beware of wolves in sheep’s clothing. When John was on the Isle of Patmos, Christ told him to write to the church at Ephesus and say,

I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which

are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars (Rev. 2:2).

Thus, we see that Paul’s admonition came true and that people even came, saying they were apostles. Notwithstanding the fact that they had tried those evil folk who claimed to be apostles and found them to be liars, they still were led to accept false teaching, for Jesus said,

Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent (Rev. 2:4-5).

Jesus said, “**If ye love me, keep my commandments**” (John 15:15). Since they left their “**first love,**” the Ephesians had digressed from keeping the commandments of the Lord. Even though the Ephesians had some good things, such as hating the doctrine of the Nicolaitans (v. 6), Jesus was not pleased with them and was going to remove their candlestick if they did not repent. In other words, He was not going to fellowship them if they did not turn away from that which was evil.

Jesus commanded the church at Pergamos, saying,

I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan’s seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth (Rev. 2:13).

However, He condemned them also:

But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitans, which thing I hate. Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth (Rev. 2:15-16).

That teaches us that today a “**few things**” are enough to separate a church from Christ; and when a church is separated from Christ, it is separated from all faithful churches.

There are some among us today who say we cannot disfellowship a whole congregation; but Jesus did, as we pointed out earlier in this article. We must follow Christ, the head. If it were unchristian to disfellowship a whole congregation, we could not have disfellowshipped the Christian Church for putting instrumental music into the

worship. Those who teach that we ought not to separate ourselves from such false teaching and practice should also be disfellowshipped for teaching false doctrine.

There are also those who say that members of a congregation must always follow the elders. That is true only if the elders follow Christ. But when elders get wise above that which is written and follow the dictations of men, we have no alternative but to disfellowship elders, preachers, or whomsoever leaves the teaching of Christ. It has been told that I have taught that the church must always follow the elders, regardless of where they lead. Such a statement is absurd and absolutely without foundation. I have contended, as long as I have been preaching, that we are to disfellowship anything that is not taught in God's book. I have rebuked elders privately, as well as in preaching and in writing, when they were wrong. Just recently I pointed out in the bulletin the error of an elder in a church in St. Louis who claimed the ability to speak in tongues today, etc. I respect and honor elders as long as they stand for the truth; but I, like David, hate every false way, whether it be taught by a preacher, elder, or anyone else. Paul says,

Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty (2 Cor. 6:17-18).

It seems, from having read many church bulletins, that today some people do not understand the meaning of New Testament fellowship. We see occasionally that some church is going to meet after the worship for a period of "fellowship." Working together in the worship and work, as God has commanded the church to do, is New Testament fellowship; and wherever we are, whether we are gathered together or separated, if we are serving God, we are in fellowship. To say that after the worship we are going to meet for a fellowship meeting is, to say the least, misleading. It suggests that there is no fellowship in the worship and work of the Lord. We understand that what they mean is that they would meet for a social gathering. But that is something that God has not commanded in His work and worship and, therefore, could not be included in the fellowship of the church, even though it may be engaged in as a social act. Yet, it should not be connected with nor spoken of as the work of the church.

The church at Corinth had perverted the Lord's supper into a social event. But Paul said to them,

When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and

one is hungry, and another is drunken. What? Have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread: And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me. After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament of my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me. For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come (1 Cor. 11:20-26).

Paul did not condemn social gathering, as such; but he condemned it in the church. We do not mean in the church building; we are talking about the work and worship of the church.

Paul instructed the Corinthian church in the first chapter how to have fellowship in the work of the Lord, saying,

Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment (1 Cor. 1:10).

If all people were "**perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment,**" based upon the Word of God, there would be no divisions among us. In that respect, we would all be "**fitly framed together,**" and fellowship would prevail among us.

Division is based upon the opinions and doctrines of men. Jesus condemned the Pharisees and called them hypocrites, saying, "**But in vain they do worship me, teaching for doctrines; the commandments of men**" (Mat. 15:9). It is wrong for anyone to fellowship any doctrine that is based upon the opinions of man. We must have a "thus saith the Lord" for everything we do in worship to God or our work in the kingdom. "**And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him**" (Col. 3:17).

There is an ecumenical movement abroad among the denominations today to unite, and some among the church of Christ have sanctioned that movement. However, there is but one way to please God in unity, and that is to be united on His Word. To unite upon a compromise is disrespectful to God and will do nothing except to revamp

denominationalism. God's Word is the same today as it was in the first century when it was written. It will be the same when Jesus Christ returns to the earth, and woe to the man who tries to alter it!

There were some in the church at Corinth in the days of Paul who were not satisfied with the Word of God, and they sought to add to it by wearing the names of Paul, Apollos, and Cephas, as well as that of Christ. Paul, Apollos, and Cephas were good, faithful men who preached the truth of God; and there was nothing in their preaching that justified the Corinthians in wearing the names of men. Paul asked them, **"Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?"** (1 Cor. 1:13). Paul was so displeased with their wearing the names of men that he said he thanked God that he baptized none of them except Crispus and Gaius, lest people should say he baptized in his own name (1 Cor. 1:14). This plainly shows that if two churches are teaching two different doctrines, at least one of them is not the church of Christ; and it is possible that neither would be the church. For two churches, teaching different doctrines, to be right, it would be necessary that Christ should be divided. We must wear the name of Him who was crucified, the one into whom we were baptized. Paul told them that he would not speak unto them as unto spiritual but as unto carnal because of the divisions among them (1 Cor. 3:1-3). Persons in the church, even the whole congregation, who are carnal and cannot be called spiritual certainly cannot be fellowshiped, according to the teaching of God.

Paul said unto those who were faithful at Corinth,

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? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them? and I will be their God and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you (2 Cor. 6:14-17).

In this Paul was speaking of spiritual things, not of marriage, as it is sometimes misinterpreted, for the context clearly shows that it refers to the worship of God. We are not to have fellowship with people who pervert God's plan in any respect.

From whence comes division? It comes by following

false teachers. The prophet Jeremiah said,

Woe be unto the pastors that destroy and scatter the sheep of my pasture! saith the Lord. Therefore thus saith the Lord God of Israel against the pastors that feed my people; Ye have scattered my flock, and driven them away, and have not visited them: behold, I will visit upon you the evil of your doings, saith the Lord (Jer. 23:1-2).

False teachers are sometimes cunning. They may emphasize love to the extent that it covers every false idea. We must not, of course, minimize love. God is love, and we must have love in preaching the gospel, but our love must be for the truth. The Holy Spirit inspired David to say that he hated *every* false way (Psa. 119:104). And Solomon said,

These six things doth the Lord hate: yea, seven are an abomination unto him: A proud look, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, An heart that deviseth wicked imaginations, feet that be swift in running to mischief, a false witness that speaketh lies, and he that soweth discord among brethren (Pro. 6:16-19).

If the Lord hates those things, we must hate them too in order to be like Him.

When Paul went to Thessalonica to preach the gospel, the unbelieving Jews stirred up a riot against him, saying, **"These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also"** (Acts 17:6). The apostle Paul, when he came to the end of his life, said,

I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing (2 Tim. 4:7-8).

We must, likewise, love the truth enough to fight for it if necessary and always be ready to suffer for it if we expect to receive a crown of righteousness as did Paul.

The Bereans were more noble than those of Thessalonica in that they searched the scriptures daily to see whether or not Paul was preaching the truth. Many today would say the Bereans did not love or they would have accepted Paul's teaching without question, but they demonstrated their love for the truth by investigating. Let us be as noble as the Bereans were and prove all doctrines and practices by the Bible before we accept them as being worthy of our fellowship, for we cannot serve two masters.

—Deceased

WHAT IS THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A HYPOCRITE AND A FAITHFUL CHRISTIAN WHO STUMBLES AT LEAST ONCE IN A WHILE?

Thomas B. Warren

The aim of this article is to pinpoint some of the basic difference between a thorough-going hypocrite and a faithful Christian who (although he realizes that he “stumbles” at least at times) strives with all of his heart to walk faithfully before God.

To correctly fight this battle, he must understand what it means to be (1) a hypocrite (one who pretends to be what he is not) and (2) a truly sincere, faithful Christian (a member of the Lord’s one and only true church)—that is, one who strives with all of his heart to love God and, as a result, to do what God’s Word (the Bible) teaches him to do.

It is possible for two people (for example, a husband and wife) to both learn and obey the truth (the Gospel of Christ), thus becoming Christians in so doing, and yet—with the passing of time—it is possible for either one or both of the two to fall away into unfaithfulness (by merely pretending to live as a Christian must). Consider the possibility that the wife remains faithful while the husband (without letting either his wife or any one else know about his apostasy) continues to be at every service of the church, even though it is the case that no longer does he give a serious thought to what is occurring all about him—especially does he not give serious attention to what is being said by the man who is preaching the sermon. Rather than listening with all of his heart to the message, he thinks of worldly matters (such as envisioning himself being engaged in some sort of worldly [sinful] activity). A man who does such things may “fool” both his wife and many others in the assembly, but he cannot deceive God Almighty. However, he may be deceiving himself into believing that God—“if indeed,” he says to himself, “there really is an infinite God and if the Bible really is His inspired word, then I shall be safe from eternal punishment—after all, I am a religious person who attends almost all of the Sunday morning worship services. So, it is clear that I have nothing to fear. I know that God—if he exists—will not cast me into any lake of fire.” So, he sits calmly in his pew with a great deal of self-satisfaction.

At the same time, another couple (husband and wife) demonstrate (even though they are not absolutely perfect and even as they engage in singing, prayer, the Lord’s

Supper, giving, or the preaching of God’s sacred Word) that they not only put God ahead of everything else in their lives, but they realize that they need the mercy of God because they are not perfect—that is, it is not the case that they never sin at anytime by (1) doing something which the Bible forbids or by (2) failing to do some deed which the Bible makes clear is something which one must do to be pleasing to God.

The two couples described briefly just above can be the source of each and every one of us weighing our lives in the light of the sacred Word of God, the Bible.

If any person is a hypocrite (merely pretends to be faithful), then if he/she is to be saved eternally, he/she must repent of their past sins and turn away from their wicked ways.

If any human being holds that he can deceive God into not knowing that he is living a hypocritical life, then—if he never subsequently repents (before his death)—he will be lost forever in the midst of very agonizing suffering.

Jesus made clear (Mat. 23:27-28) that every hypocrite is in very deep trouble. On the “outside” they are “beautiful” but on the “inside” they are full of mere bones and filth. Let us all help one another so that we will not be eternally punished.

It would be good for every person to thoroughly examine his own heart and deeds with the sincere intention of (1) not masking who he really is while he merely plays a part for those who observe him, (2) not acting with the desire—not to actually do what is right but merely to gain the approval of other mere human beings (see Matthew 6:1-3), (3) not being satisfied with the mere external aspects of religion while he pays no attention to the crucial matters of love for God and his fellow human beings (Mat. 15:1-21), (4) not using the language of the Bible in such fashion as to hide the real motives which are concealed in his heart (Mat. 22:18-22), and (5) not ignoring the marvelous teaching of Jesus by which He warns every hypocrite. May each and every one of us earnestly strive to reject all hypocritical thoughts and deeds.

—Deceased



JAMES: Practical Christianity (Part 2)

May 25th

Fish Hatchery Road Church Of Christ

These timely lessons will be presented at the church of Christ
Located at 1380 Fish Hatchery Road, Huntsville, Texas
Phone: 936-581-4346 Email: bruces_l@netzero.com

The book of James is so practical that some have called it “the gospel of common sense.” Because the Christian faith is not just an organization to join or a few abstract doctrines to hold, a letter like James is immediately relevant to every Christian. The Christian faith requires each believer to bring every thought and action into conformity to the Word of God. It proclaims a Christian philosophy of life in stark contrast to the self-seeking, unfocused, and often tumultuous existence that frequently characterizes those outside the faith. A matter worth pondering is the fact that the very first topic James discussed involved the difficulties encountered in the Christian life. Totally foreign to him was the curious modern notion that becoming a Christian will make life easier, that all problems will disappear.

9:00 AM: Raymond Wiseman – *The Sin Of Partiality* (2:1-13)

10:00 AM: John West - *The Relationship Between Faith & Works* (2:14-26)

11:00 AM: David Brown - *The Use & Abuse Of The Tongue* (3:1-12)

LUNCH WILL BE PROVIDED

1:30 PM: Jose Gamez - *Wisdom From Above* (3:13-18)

2:30 PM: Raymond Wiseman - *Friendship With The World Is Enmity With God* (4:1-12)

3:30 PM: *Question & Answer Session*

THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

Danny Box

The book of Romans is one of the most profound documents known to man. Its theme deals with man's righteousness before God. Its thesis sets out the only means of standing righteous before Him—through the Gospel. A number of matters are dealt with throughout its sixteen chapters. A study of its contents will profit one immensely.

Although Romans contains matters which are, at times, difficult to understand, it also contains material of a very practical nature. The first few verses of chapter 12 constitutes such section. In these verses one can find teaching concerning his attitude in four vital areas. Notice these areas:

Man's Attitude Toward GOD (12:1). In this verse Paul speaks of one's "**reasonable service.**" The presentation of one's self as a "**living sacrifice**" constitutes that "**reasonable service.**" Certainly it is reasonable that, if God gave His Son for me, I should be willing to live for Him. The right attitude toward God is that I am His and I am willing to dedicate myself to His service!

Man's Attitude Toward The WORLD (12:2). A refusal to be conformed to its standards is the proper attitude which one should have toward the world. The standards of the world are fickle and change with the moods of man and the trends of society. Paul said, "**Be not conformed to this world; but be ye transformed...**" In

order for transformation to take place, a refusal of conformation must be maintained. The right attitude toward the world is that I refuse to be shaped by it and conformed to it, and that I keep myself "**unspotted**" from it!

Man's Attitude Toward SELF (12:3). Paul instructs every individual "**not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think.**" Having dedicated himself to God and refusing to abide by the world's standards, man must continually guard against the inclinations to "be his own boss." The right attitude toward myself is that I am not longer in charge...GOD is!

Man's Attitude Toward The CHURCH (12:4.5). The church is the body of Christ (Col. 1:18). It is singular in nature, though made up of many individuals. Its members have all done the same thing (obeyed the Gospel) to be a part of it. Because of obedience they have been added by the Lord to the church (Acts 2:47). All members are of equal value to the Lord (Gal. 3:28). The right attitude toward the church then is that I realize its importance and necessity (Acts 20:28; Eph. 5:23) and understand my role in it.

Now brethren and friends, let me ask you, do YOU have the right attitude toward GOD? the WORLD? YOURSELF? the CHURCH? If not, why not?

—Deceased