

Sunday, January 8, 2023 am

CLOSER TO GOD (38)

Fellowship With One Another -2

Last year, as part of our theme, we began discussing the subject of fellowship. This is an important subject to understand, as drawing closer to God is about being in fellowship with Him. The Biblical usages of the term for fellowship is spiritual in nature. By definition, the word means, “joint participation” or a mutual sharing with others. We have noticed its usage in the New Testament. We have also discussed what fellowship with God means and how our fellowship with one another needs to be based upon our fellowship with God (cf. 1 John 1:3).

In our last lesson, we developed our fellowship with one another by noting that fellowship implies unity – we are in agreement with one another. We also examined 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1 as it gives us an understanding of what fellowship involves – Paul described how we are NOT to have spiritual fellowship with the world and the worldly, OR to even put ourselves in a position where we are at a disadvantage with them. The point is that we cannot live in such a way that worldliness affects us to the point of damaging our fellowship with God. In our lesson today we want to discuss spiritual fellowship with one another – with whom may we have fellowship and who may we NOT have fellowship with.

I. With whom may we have fellowship?

- a. The answer to that is straight forward – those who are in fellowship with God. 1 John 1:3-4 makes this clear.
- b. When we are determining who we ought to recognize as brethren we consider:
 - i. Whether they are walking in the light - (1 John 1:5-7)
 - ii. Keeping His commandments – ALL of them! Psalm 119:63 says, *“I am a companion of all who fear You, and of those who keep Your precepts.”* Psalm 15:1, 4 - *Lord, who may abide in Your tabernacle? Who may dwell in Your holy hill? He who walks uprightly, And works righteousness, ... In whose eyes a vile person is despised, But he honors those who fear the Lord; He who swears to his own hurt and does not change;*
Again, we might consider – WHICH ones? The answer ought to be obvious – ALL of them. Matthew 7:21-23, James 2:10 – to stumble in one point is to be guilty of all.
 - iii. We seek those who are striving for the unity we previously addressed
 - iv. We seek those who love us as God has commanded – cf. 1 John 4:20-21, 5:2-3.
 - v. Those who have joined together with us, BASED upon His standard, to work together. Our work and worship as His body are fellowship (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:16). The church is a body of believers in fellowship with one another. Acts 2:42, Ephesians 3:8-11 – Paul desired that that all see *“what is the fellowship of the mystery which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God who created all things through Jesus Christ, to the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church...”* Philippians 2:1 – together we fellowship in the Spirit; 1 Corinthians 1:9-10, we are called into the fellowship of His Son..., etc.

II. With whom may we NOT have fellowship?

- a. When it comes to those in the world, the answer is obvious. Those who are doing things contrary to God’s word ought not be accepted.
 - i. This is the primary emphasis of Paul in 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1, 1 John 2:15-16, etc.
 - ii. NOTE: This is not saying to isolate yourself from everyone in the world. If so, how can you reach others and how can you let your shine? And what about making a living? Living within your society, trying to make it a little better? Civic responsibilities? Etc.
 - iii. Consider the following

1. Matthew 5:14-15 – Jesus said, Don't put your light under a basket. The world needs to see the light of Christ shining from time to time.
 2. 1 Corinthians 9:19-23 – Paul became "all things to all men", including those without law, the weak, Jews and Gentiles alike (without compromising His faith by participating in sinful activity)
 3. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13. Paul clarified that there is a difference between associating with those in the world and participating in their sinful activities. Note vs. 11 – do not keep company with anyone named a brother... (more in a few moments).
 4. Remember, fellowship is "joint participation".
 - a. Romans 1:32, after giving a list of evil behaviors that men and women who abandon God participate in, he spoke of not only those doing them "*but also approve of those who participate in them.*"
 - b. Consider Judas as he accepted a bribe to betray Jesus (Mark 14:10-11). He was guilty and participated with them.
 - c. Saul holding the garments of those who stoned Stephen to death (Acts 7:58, 8:1). Paul would later admit his guilt in such things – Acts 22:19-20 as Paul retells his conversion to a mob in Jerusalem.
 - iv. Add to these numerous passages that tell us to avoid wicked and sinful behaviors – 2 Timothy 2:22, Ephesians 5:11 – have no fellowship with the "unfruitful works of darkness". Proverbs 1:10ff – "*My son, if sinners entice you, do not consent...*"
 - v. This is where we make a distinction between the world's definition and the Biblical definition of fellowship.
- b. Consider: We have established fellowship with God – based upon walking in the light. NOTE that God does NOT have fellowship with everyone who professes fellowship with Him (Matthew 7:21-23, 1 John 1:5-6). SO, why should we conclude that we can have fellowship with one who does NOT have fellowship with God, even IF he claims to be a follower of God. Again remember 1 John 1:3-4. Ephesians 5:11 charges us to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness.
- c. But is it possible that some who profess to be brethren ought not to be fellowshiped? Consider the following:
- i. If one is practicing sin or error, we ought to not have fellowship with them –
 1. 2 Timothy 3:1-5 – even those who "have a form of godliness but denying its power"
 2. 2 Thessalonians 3:6 – withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly
 3. 1 Corinthians 5:1-6 – we have here a brother in an adulterous relationship
 4. 1 John 1:6-7 speaks of those walking in darkness.
 5. NOTE 1 Corinthians 9:21 where Paul is describing the lengths he went to, to win others. He says, *to those who are without law, as without law (not being without law toward God, but under law toward Christ), that I might win those who are without law;* NOTICE, he was NOT willing to compromise or associate with ungodly practices REGARDLESS of who engaged in them.
 - ii. If one is teaching error, we ought to not have fellowship with them - 2 John 9-11, 1 Timothy 6:3-5. Galatians 2:1-5 – Paul did not yield, even for an hour to those teaching and demanding false practices (namely – Gentile circumcision).
 - iii. If one refuses to repent of his sins – either actions or doctrine – we ought not have fellowship with him. If fellowship exists, that needs to change - Matthew 18:15-17
 - iv. If one is causing division or trouble – first, in so doing he is practicing error (unless he is trying to correct those in error). Consider Diotrephes 3 John 9-10 – a self-willed troublemaker who wanted to run the church and removed faithful brethren. Such are walking disorderly – Romans 16:17-18 – and are to be noted.

- v. If one has been withdrawn from, we ought to not have fellowship with them – the whole premise of withdrawing is to break fellowship with them with the hopes that they will come back – 1 Corinthians 5:1-6, then 9-11.
- d. CONSIDER also 1 Timothy 5:22 where Paul warns Timothy, *Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor share in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.*
 - i. The word "share" is fellowship. The warning is to NOT take part in it.
 - ii. We MUST realize that when we ignore the sins of another, we bear guilt – consider again 2 John 10-11, *If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; **for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds.***
 - iii. You can also apply that to 1 Corinthians 5 where they ignored the man in a sinful relationship. Heed the warning to the church – a little leaven will leaven the whole lump (1 Corinthians 5:6-7).
 - iv. We also see that in Revelation 2:14-15 with the church in Pergamos that compromised the truth by allowing false doctrine in their midst
 - v. and Revelation 2:20-21 with the church in Thyatira that not only tolerated immorality, but they allowed it to be taught (doctrinal and moral error).

And thus we can see fellowship with one another. It needs to be based on fellowship with God first, and to the best of our judgment, that needs to determine whether or not we have fellowship with one another. It is NOT a question of whether or not we CAN have fellowship with others (based on the worldly definition), but the question is: Does God approve of our fellowship? In our next lesson, we want to address this from a congregational standpoint.