

Sunday, May 21, 2023

CLOSER TO GOD (43) Fellowship - Issues that Matter

It has been awhile since our themed study for 2023-24, "Closer to God". We have covered much ground, and we still have a little bit to go. So today, I would like to resume our study of fellowship and churches. Thus far dealing with fellowship, we have noted: 1) What fellowship is and how it begins with God (1 John 1:1-7); 2) We then addressed fellowship with one another emphasizing how it ought to be based upon fellowship with God and a love for His word. We ought to consider whether they are truly striving to follow His word. And while uncomfortable, there are those who we ought to NOT have fellowship with – in particular, those practicing error, teaching error, causing division. In all these matters it involves one who refuses to repent. 3) We then began addressing fellowship and churches – by noting that a church ought to strive for fellowship with God. That is based upon their teaching and standing for truth. Also, conversely they must reject error –false teachers, false teaching and tolerating immoral conduct. 4) We followed this up with a study of compromise, noting its various usages. There are times we ought to be willing to compromise (matters of personal judgment, personalities and such), BUT our concern is with matters of compromising with error – whether it be those practicing error, teaching error or tolerating those in error. We discussed the dangers of such compromise. We also examined some examples of compromise in the history of Israel and what the results were.

Today, I want to present one more lesson on fellowship – it want to notice some specific doctrines that we ought to be concerned about. These are doctrines are dividing brethren in various places and even more so, corrupting or compromising the purity of the church. We will notice a few of these and discuss WHY they are issues of importance.

NOTE: Much of this lesson is based upon a lesson presented by Bret Hogland as part of a series of lessons entitled, "Lest we drift away" that addresses the subjects of fellowship and compromise between brethren and with some application between churches. In this study addressed how some churches are compromising the gospel message. This in turn can lead to compromising our sanctification (purity). And, if not confronted and changed, this can affect our fellowship – both with God and with one another.

I. Gospel/Doctrine distinction –

- a. A few decades ago, a movement among brethren was introduced which stated that there is a distinction between doctrine and the gospel. They contended that the gospel was the message of Jesus – His life, death and resurrection, and that doctrine was a product of the church which came afterward. They argue that the only thing that is important is the gospel. All else is subjective. There are some who teach that as long as we agree on the gospel, we can disagree on doctrine.
- b. First, we define the terms: Gospel means simply the "good news" and it DOES center around the life of Jesus; Doctrine is simply another term for "teaching". In the New Testament, like 'grace' and 'faith' and obedient 'works', they complement each other.
- c. Consider a few thoughts about the usage of the words Gospel and doctrine (as well as truth and faith). In many passages, these terms have reference to the whole system of the Christian and can be used interchangeably. Consider:
 - i. Colossians 1:23 speaks of continuing in "the faith, grounded and steadfast, and are not moved away from the hope of the gospel."
 - ii. 1 Timothy 1:10-11, noting that the law was made... *for fornicators, for sodomites, for kidnappers, for liars, for perjurers, and if there is any other thing that is contrary to **sound doctrine**, according to the glorious gospel of the blessed God which was committed to my trust.*
 - iii. *Galatians 2:5, 14* where Paul mentions *the truth of the gospel*. NOTE how he rebukes Peter for his hypocrisy in avoiding Gentiles when in the presence of his Jewish companions. The

truth of the gospel was not about the life of Jesus, but conduct CONTRARY to teachings that resulted FROM the life and death of Jesus. While Jesus alluded to the coming change, it was the apostles, including Paul that taught it in Acts and their letters.

- iv. Consider what we are called upon to obey:
 - 1. 2 Thessalonians 1:8 – we “*obey the gospel*”,
 - 2. Romans 6:17 – we obey “*that form of doctrine*” – likely a reference to baptism
 - 3. Acts 6:7 many, even of the priests were “obedient to the faith.”
 - 4. 1 Peter 1:22 souls are purified in obeying the truth.
- d. We could notice many other examples, but we see here that in essence the gospel and doctrine are inseparable.
- e. In essence this doctrine teaches that you can do whatever you want to do, as long as you have “obeyed the gospel”. BUT how far do go with this? Can we even agree on how one obeys the gospel? Do we accept those who advance a different plan of salvation? Where will you draw the line? AND where will that line be drawn in the coming generation.

II. **Reinterpreting 2 John 9-11 –**

- a. Related to the previous point, there are some who have advanced the notion that the “doctrine of Christ” mentioned in 2 John 9 is a reference to the doctrine (or teachings) ABOUT Christ (His nature) instead of the teachings OF Christ which continued with the apostles (hence the entire New Testament).
- b. And examination of the text and context itself gives us insight into what is meant.
 - i. First, consider the text:
 - 1. We are to “abide in” this doctrine. That wording indicates a place where we are dwelling. This implies it is something that affects how we live. Simply believing that Jesus lived, even as recorded in the gospels, will not change us unless there are teachings associated with that.
 - 2. “Doctrine” is a word that simply means teachings. When we consider what Jesus taught, it helps us understand what this doctrine is. Consider Matthew 7:28 as Jesus concluded the Sermon on the Mount. They were astonished at His “doctrine”. What astonished them? Was it His telling them about Himself or what He had just taught them?
John 16:12-15 – Jesus instructed His apostles that the Holy Spirit would guide them into all truth, which is what they would be teaching. Cf. 1 Corinthians 14:37 where Paul noted, *If anyone thinks himself to be a prophet or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things which I write to you are the commandments of the Lord.*
 - 3. “Of Christ” – this word is in the genitive case which typically means the possessor or possession of something. When we see this expression, we typically it is something that belongs to the one or thing mentioned. E.g. – the “blood of Christ”. IOW, this phrase could CLEARLY mean the teachings that come from Christ.
 - ii. The context of 2 John 9
 - 1. Consider 2 John 1-2 – John is writing to the elect lady and commends here “*because of the truth which abides in you.*”
 - 2. 2 John 4 – he rejoiced because they were “walking in truth”
 - 3. 2 John 5-6 – they were to walk “according to His commandments”. May I refer you to John 15:10, *If you keep My commandments, you will abide in My love, just as I have kept My Father’s commandments and abide in His love.* John 8:31, “*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.*”
 - 4. Clearly, what John had in mind was the teachings of Jesus.

- c. Consider how there are general truths that are addressed with a specific application, but the point is the principal applies – e.g. Galatians 5:1-4 – can you “fall from grace” in a matter other than returning to the Old Law? James 2:1-5 deals with partiality of class. Does it also apply to racial or ethnic partiality?
- d. Consider also how “the doctrine of” is used throughout the New Testament:
 - i. Matthew 16:6, 12 – of the Pharisees
 - ii. Colossians 2:22 – doctrines of men
 - iii. 1 Timothy 4:1 – doctrines of demons
 - iv. Revelation 2:15 – doctrine of the Nicolaitans
- e. A study of doctrine in the NT makes it pretty clear that 2 John 9 is talking about teachings, which would INCLUDE the entire NT.
- f. The only reason one would teach this differently is if they wanted to dismiss doctrinal teachings they did not want to follow. IOW, the result of this is that as long as you believe in Jesus, you are free to do whatever you want.

III. **Continuous cleansing –**

- a. Teaches that the blood of Jesus automatically cleanses a Christian of sin, or certain types of sins, “even as he is sinning” as stated by some. 1 John 1:6-2:2 is used as a text, especially vs. 7. Some will say that as long as we are trying God will overlook our sins. They might use the illustration of an umbrella (as long as you are under that umbrella) or windshield wipers (continuously wiping your sins as you move along). And they might apply this to sins of ignorance or weakness or committed in sincerity.
- b. This is contrary to scripture which warns us that we CANNOT sin and be pleasing to God – 1 John 3:4-9. And it does not matter whether it is a sin of weakness, ignorance, or willful rebellion.
- c. But the text is NOT teaching that we can continue in sin. As with the previous point, the text answers itself:
 - i. Vs. 5 – God is light and in Him is NO darkness at all. Will God tolerate a little darkness in our lives?
 - ii. Vs. 6 – IF we are walking in darkness, we are NOT in fellowship with Him. How much darkness can we walk in and be ok?
 - iii. Vs. 7 – it is when we are walking in the light that we are cleansed. Walking in the light would imply that we are taking care of our sins.
 - iv. Vs. 9 notes what we do when we sin - IF we confess our sin, He is faithful to forgive. Acts 8:22 – Simon the sorcerer was told to repent and pray.
 - v. 2:1 – John is writing “so that you may not sin”.
 - vi. 2:1 – he also notes that we CAN be forgiven, because of what Jesus has done for us.
- d. This is not to say that God is waiting for us to sin so that He can condemn us at the slightest slip. BUT we MUST understand that sin is NEVER acceptable. James 2:10 – one point is all it takes. That is why we must be continually vigilant. The one walking in the light IS GOING TO REPENT when he does sin!
- e. In essence this is a modified form of “once saved, always saved”, short of outright rebellion. It also opens the door for relaxing our standard of purity and righteousness. And, of course, those advocating this doctrine often set the terms for which it applies.

IV. **Unity in Doctrinal Diversity –**

- a. A problem we have today, even among brethren is the declaration that we cannot understand the Bible alike. This has prompted some to advocate open fellowship with those practicing known errors. It has prompted others to avoid controversial or divisive subjects.
- b. This is NOT what the Bible teaches:
 - i. Ephesians 5:17 -We CAN understand what the will of the Lord is. It is NOT always easy, but with effort we can.

- ii. 1 Corinthians 1:10 – we are called to “*speak the same thing*” and “*that there be no divisions among you, but that you be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.*” You do NOT do this by ignoring doctrinal diversity. In fact (and we devoted a lesson to this dealing with Corinth), Paul was writing to them to CLARIFY doctrine in various areas.
- iii. 1 Timothy 4:13, 16 - Timothy was told to give attention to reading, exhortation and doctrine (teaching). Vs. 16, in doing this he would save himself and those who heard him. Ephesians 4:11-16 finds teaching leaders grounding the saints “till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God... no longer tossed to and from and carried about with every wind of doctrine...” This is what causes the body (the church) to grow properly.
- iv. Consider also Romans 16:17-18 – note those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned; -1 Tim. 1:18-20 – some have rejected the faith and suffered shipwreck.
- v. Consider also 2 John 9-11 and Ephesians 5:11.
- c. UID has no objective standard with which we are to apply teaching. It becomes a “free for all”. AND the question we must address is, Where do we draw that line? If you are following trends among brethren (I am to a small degree), you can see this attitude developing. I know of gospel preachers who now see acapella music in worship as nothing more than a preference. And I have read comments where the only people they condemn are those who demand doctrinal and moral purity. Like society they preach tolerance, but they are intolerant of those who challenge their views of tolerance.

V. **Misapplying Romans 14 –**

- a. There are brethren and churches that go to Romans 14 to advocate “unity in diversity”. They appeal to the attitudes that Paul addresses about how we are to treat each other when we differ (which is a good thing), BUT they expand the context from its limits to include all manner of doctrinal teachings.
- b. The context of Romans 14 is clear. Romans 14:1, “*Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things.*” It is addressing matter about which God is indifferent – examples given are: 1) The observing of days, and 2) What “meats” we should or should not eat. These are matters of conscience and NOT firmly taught doctrinal teachings.
- c. Let me encourage you to READ THE CHAPTER.
- d. Romans 14 is NOT addressing matters of moral sin (Gal. 5:19-21, Romans 13:13-14 – not in revery and drunkenness, lewdness, etc.); doctrinal errors (Romans 16:17-18) – such as MDR, the work and worship of the church, etc.; Be reminded of 2 John 9-11 which DOES deal with doctrine!

VI. **Why are we concerned?**

- a. What do all of these teachings have in common? They are attempts to extend fellowship to those who are teaching/practicing/tolerating error. That is contrary to what fellowship is as defined. They are not new, and among brethren many of these ideas were introduced in the last century, but they have been refined and we are seeing their prevalence today.
- b. We have noted in previous lessons, that both individuals and churches can sever their fellowship with God. It is done by failing to follow His word.
- c. Many churches are quietly caught up in these types of doctrines. Some outright advocate errors, whether it be moral issues (such as MDR), doctrinal issues (theistic evolution, premillennialism, realized eschatology, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, etc.). Others just say nothing. They may not be teaching these doctrines directly, but their silence on such matters leads to implicit approval and a dangerous ignorance. Remember Hosea 4:6, “*My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge...*”
- d. Because of such doctrines there are churches that refuse to take a stand on
- e. These types of doctrines are wrecking the brotherhood. Consider the direction it almost always leads – further from God. If we compromise God’s standard in the little things, it is virtually guaranteed

that the next generation will take it further. That is what happened in Israel continually, and we see it today continually.

- f. Brethren, this is WHY it matters whom we seek to have fellowship with – whether individuals or congregations.

If churches and/or individuals are caught up in these types of teachings, we ought to be concerned. IF I am caught up in these types of beliefs, I ought to be concerned. And if we are aware of such, we ought to “*have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them.*” (Ephesians 5:11). Friends, fellowship is fellowship – whether are talking about fellowship with God, one another or even congregations. Be also reminded of 2 Corinthians 6:14-17. We are to be circumspect - alert (Ephesians 5:15). These are also some of the issues we ought to consider when we are looking for a congregation in a given area.