

Lesson #1

FELLOWSHIP: Introduced & Defined

Why the recent focus on fellowship?

What does the Bible word mean?

A Brief Introduction

Background To Set The Context

- Discussion about the proper bounds of fellowship goes back to Bible times
- Much discussed throughout history
- Topic of much interest during early efforts to restore N.T. Christianity in this country
- Limits tested in controversies over use of instrumental music & missionary societies
- Again tested with institutional controversy

Present Context Of Discussion

- In 1988, well known brother advocated view most admitted as error on divorce & remarriage
- Some defended right of brethren to receive one doing such teaching into fellowship
- Principle proposed was that we can receive:
 - *those teaching some doctrinal errors and/or*
 - *those engaged in some sinful practices*
 - *into our on-going fellowship*
- This is the issue we will be addressing

Biblical Definition of “FELLOWSHIP”

Fellowship: The Word Family

- “Fellowship” (Greek word *koinonia*)
 - used of an association or close relationship
 - also refers to generosity, a gift or the act of sharing in something
- “To share” or “give a share” (*koinoneo*)
- “Partner, companion, sharer” (*koinonos*)
- “Joint” participation
 - both noun and verb form plus prefix “with”

Forms Used in New Testament

- * Dictionary Definitions Help, But...
- * Let’s look at the appearances of the word in the Bible to help us understand its meaning and use

Uses in Septuagint (LXX)

- **Leviticus 6:2** - “*fellowship*” (KJV)
 - refers to something held in common; pledge
- **Job 34:8** - “*goeth in company with...*”
 - suggests an association of implied approval
- **Proverbs 28:24** - “*companion of destroyer*”
 - Brenton: “partaker with an ungodly man”
- **2 Chronicles 20:35** - “*joined*”
 - Brenton: “entered an alliance”

General Uses in New Testament

- **Hebrews 2:14**
 - reference to sharing in humanity
- **Luke 5:10**
 - denoting those who were “partners” in fishing
- **Matthew 23:30**
 - likeness between Pharisees & prophets’ killers
- *In each case, denotes association based on common goals & in common action*

Use of Term in Spiritual Association of Believers

2 Corinthians 6:14-16

¹⁴ Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

What Is Fellowship? *Let The Bible Define Itself*

- **Yoked** - implies a common work
- **Fellowship** - denotes “share” in action
- **Communion** - normal word for “fellowship”
- **Concord** - implies harmony of thought
- **Portion** - having a part together with others
- **Agreement** - a union of purpose
- *Hence, agreement in principle leading to joint or common action in spiritual work*

What Common Principles & Action?

¹⁷ Wherefore Come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, And touch no unclean thing; And I will receive you, ¹⁸ And will be to you a Father, And ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty. ¹ Having therefore these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all defilement of flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God. (2 Corinthians 6:17 – 7:1)

Common Principles & Actions

- Principle = holiness as taught by God
- Actions = cleansed & separated from sin
- **Ephesians 5:3-12**
- **Romans 1:32**
- **Revelation 18:1-5**
- Common principle & action of saints to sin?
- *Maintain holiness & come out from sin!*
- Is there any lesson for us in acceptance or tolerance for sin and error?

New Testament Examples Of FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship in Suffering

- **Philippians 3:10**
 - Paul’s fellowship with Christ in suffering
- **1 Peter 4:12-13**
 - Christians sharing in suffering with Christ
- **Hebrews 10:32-33**
 - Christians sharing with brethren in suffering
 - see also 2 Corinthians 1:5-7
- Each shared common principle & action

Fellowship in Benevolence

- **Romans 15:25-27**
 - reasons for physical aid was spiritual relation
- **2 Corinthians 8:1-5**
- **2 Corinthians 9:12-14**
- **Romans 12:13**
- Brethren had “fellowship” despite distance
- Based on common faith & action in Christ

Fellowship in Preaching Gospel

- **Philippians 1:3-7**
- **Philippians 4:14-16**
 - brethren & Paul had fellowship though not in same congregation; geographic separation
- **Galatians 6:6**
- Common principles led to this support
- Common action was concurrent in nature

Condemned Fellowship

- **1 Corinthians 10:14-21**
 - not to commune with idolatry in thought or action
 - communion of believers is with Christ
- **1 Timothy 5:22**
- **2 John 9-11**
 - three groups condemned in this passage

Examining 2 John 9-11

- One going beyond doctrine of Christ
- One not bringing doctrine of Christ
- One aiding erring teacher is partaker

Fellowship in Same Faith

- **Philemon 4-7**
- **Romans 11:11-24**
 - basis provided by deity (1Cor 1:9; 2Cor 13:14)
- **1 Peter 5:1**
- **2 Peter 1:4**
- **Galatians 2:7-9**
- Common principle set by will of God
- Common action: salvation, faith, service...

Conclusion

- Fellowship involves common principle & action
 - **YOKE – COMMUNION – CONCORD – PORTION – AGREEMENT**
- Direction of principle & action found in Word

Lesson #2

Fellowship In Truth

Can we understand the Bible alike?

Does the Bible lack clarity on some matters essential to our salvation?

Reviewing the Bible Definition of Fellowship (2 Cor. 6:14-16)

¹⁴ Be not unequally **yoked** with unbelievers: for what **fellowship** have righteousness and iniquity? or what **communion** hath light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what **concord** hath Christ with Belial? or what **portion** hath a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what **agreement** hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

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Tonight’s Class: *Relation of Fellowship & Truth*

Why Study This Relationship?

- By-product of justification for continued fellowship with those teaching error on divorce & remarriage
- Argument made that Bible teaching on the issue lacked sufficient “clarity”
- Same argument has been made for tolerance towards other moral sins

View Stated & Applied

“I do not regard Homer Hailey as a false teacher, even though I believe him to be wrong in his interpretation of Matthew 19 (as he believes me to be wrong about Christians serving in the military), because I am persuaded by his conduct and his arguments that he honestly believes that he is faithful to God’s teaching on the subject. Neither of us would fellowship a clear adulterer, but, at least for the time being, we entrust the judgment of one another’s conscience on this question to God. Each of these judgments is based on an admission that we regard the subject as sufficiently lacking in clarity to accept a brother who disagrees with us.... We are making verdicts about clarity and honesty of intent. Let me be clear about clarity. My conclusion about the clarity of a passage involves both how clear it seems to me and also of those who disagree with me. It is that distinction that separates a weak brother from a false teacher. A false teacher is either ignorant (II Pet. 3:5; Rom. 10:3), deluded (I Tim. 4:2; Rom. 1:21-23; II Thess. 2:11) or a deceiver (II Pet. 2:1-3) -- he is not honestly mistaken about God’s clear instruction.”

--- Ed Harrell, “Divorce & Fellowship,” F.C. Forum manuscript (1991), pp. 10-11 ---

Fellowship & Truth: *Examining the Bible Connection*

1 John 1:1-7

¹ *That which was from the beginning, that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld, and our hands handled, concerning the Word of life* ² *(and the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare unto you the life, the eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us);* ³ *that which we have seen and heard declare we unto you also, that ye also may have fellowship with us: yea, and our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ:* ⁴ *and these things we write, that our joy may be made full.* ⁵ *And this is the message which we have heard from him and announce unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.* ⁶ *If we say that we have fellowship with him and walk in the darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:* ⁷ *but if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanseth us from all sin.*

Summary of Points in 1 John 1

- Message of truth was faithfully delivered by reliable eyewitnesses
- Revelation of that truth was the result of a fellowship between God & apostles
- That “fellowship” we know as “inspiration”
- Inspired revelation is basis for fellowship among brethren
- Confidence in reliability of revelation = Sure basis for our fellowship with brethren

Ephesians 3:3-7

¹ *For this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Christ Jesus in behalf of you Gentiles,--* ² *if so be that ye have heard of the dispensation of that grace of God which was given me to you-ward;* ³ *how that by revelation was made known unto me the mystery, as I wrote before in few words,* ⁴ *whereby, when ye read, ye can perceive my understanding in the mystery of Christ;* ⁵ *which in other generation was not made known unto the sons of men, as it hath now been revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets in the Spirit;* ⁶ *to wit, that the Gentiles are fellow-heirs, and fellow-members of the body, and fellow-partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel,* ⁷ *whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of that grace of God which was given me according to the working of his power.*

How Do We Understand Truth?

- Apostles guided by inspiration of Spirit
- They *wrote* down what God revealed
- We then *read* what they wrote
- We can then *perceive* the meaning
- Thus, we can have same *understanding* as the apostles who wrote it
- **How? *Once revealed, all are under the same obligation to understand the truth***

Other Passages Confirm: *We Can & Must Understand Truth*

- Ephesians 5:17
- 2 Peter 1:1-4
- 2 Timothy 3:16-17
- John 7:17
- Matthew 7:7-8
- Understanding & obedience of truth required
- *Since God gives no impossible instruction, we must be able to understand & apply it*

Confidence in human ability to understand = Confidence in God's inspiration Read: 2 Peter 1:12-21 (especially vs. 16-21) & 1 Peter 1:10-12

Peter Regarding Inspiration

- Peter affirms the reliable revelation of truth as a result of divine inspiration
- Word made “sure” as “men spake being moved by the Holy Spirit”
- Even when prophets did not understand the message, they accurately delivered it
- Why? Holy Spirit controlled the words
- Compare 1 Corinthians 2:10-13
- God assures it is reliable & understandable

Old Testament Examples of Inspiration

Isaiah 6:1-13

- Isaiah recognized problem: *unclean lips*
- Prepared for work as prophet by seraphim cleansing his *mouth* or *lips*
- Note: preparation was not of prophet's mind (thinking), but his *lips* (speaking)
- Isaiah then sees his readiness to be prophet
- Told to speak the message of God until no hearer remained, even when rejected

Jeremiah 1:4-19

- “*Word* of Jehovah” came to Jeremiah
- Doubting Jeremiah is told, “*Whatever I shall command thee, thou shalt speak*”
- God touching *mouth* of Jeremiah = “I have put *My words in thy mouth*”
- God affirmed, “*I watch over My word to perform it*”
- Prophet instructed to speak truth despite opposition or God would “dismay thee”

Ezekiel 2 & 3

- “The Spirit entered into me...”
- Repeatedly told by God to “speak *My words* unto them”
- Symbolized by *eating* the roll of the book
- “*All My words* that I shall speak unto thee **receive in thy heart and hear** with thine ears”
– no automatic implanting to prophet’s mind
- *Prophet told to speak all of God’s words even though the people rejected the truth*

Case of Balaam: Numbers 22-24

- Balaam wanted to do evil (2 Pet 2:15; Jude 11)
- “*I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah my God, to do less or more*”
- God even caused donkey to speak His truth
- Balaam tried to curse Israel, but blessing was given because God controlled words
- “*I cannot go beyond the word of Jehovah, to do either good or bad of my own mind...*”
- God controlled truth of His message so that no one could change by evil (cf. Jn 11:49f)

N.T. Writers Show Confidence In Inspiration

- *2 Timothy 1:8-14*
- Paul had personal confidence in message
- Urged Timothy to have same confidence
- Gospel presented as that which could be understood & obeyed as a “pattern”
- Gospel to be perpetually taught (2 Tim 2:2)
- Truth always upheld in midst of opposition

Clarity of Teaching on Divorce & Remarriage (Matthew 19:9)

Where Is The Lack Of Clarity?

- *Whosoever?*
- *Shall put away his wife?*
- *Except for fornication?*
- *And shall marry another?*
- *Committeth adultery?*
- *And he that marrieth her when she is put away?*
- *Committeth adultery?*
- **The problem is not in lack of clarity!**

Where Is The Questioning Of Biblical Clarity Headed?

- When brother Hailey taught error on *divorce & remarriage* in '88, it "lacked clarity"
- In years since, other moral sins are said to lack clarity too (gray areas growing):
 - *Dancing*
 - *Immodest dress*
 - *Gambling*
 - *Social drinking*
- Now, hear the *creation account* lacks clarity (some affirm "Big Bang Theory" as beginning)
- *Ends in growing tolerance for sin & error*

Effects of Growing Compromise

- If justifiable defense of adultery is granted...
- ... how bad can mere dancing, immodest dress, gambling & a little drinking be?
- When we accept that the creation account lacks clarity to determine if literal...
- ... why believe literal truths attached to it?
 - *Marriage laws (Genesis 2 & Matthew 19)*
 - *Deity of Christ (John 1)*
 - *Second coming of Christ (2 Peter 3)*

With Each Compromise & Toleration For Error...

- We move the battleground for what is seen as "evil" further away
- We obscure the standard of doctrinal purity & replace it with subjective, human thinking
- We become dulled to the eternal price in souls lost due to disobeying the truth
- We put a weight of traditional tolerance on our children & make their fall almost inevitable

May God help us to stand for His truth & bow no knee unto the modern Baal of compromise

- *Truth can be understood*
- *Truth can be obeyed*
- *We must do so*

Lesson #3

Receive Him Not (2 John 9-11)

*Is there a pattern regarding those whom we may not receive?
Who is a false teacher? May we have one preach?*

Fellowship With Those In Doctrinal Error & Sinful Practice?

- Issue arose regarding the right of brethren to have fellowship with one teaching error regarding divorce and remarriage
- Some now defend ongoing fellowship with one teaching doctrinal error and one practicing sin
- Using the Bible definition of sin, how could this be possible?

The Issue Is NOT...

- **Should we be longsuffering to reach sinner?**
– *We must be longsuffering to all (1 Thess 5:14)*
- **Should we love the sinner?**
– *We must love all men (Mt 5:43-48; 1 Thess 3:12)*
- **Are differing levels of growth permitted?**
– *They are (1 Pet 2:2; Heb 5:12-14; Col 1:9-11)*
- **Does fellowship preclude every difference?**
– *No, if no inherent sin, may receive one (Rom 14)*

We Will Center This Study On Two Main Points:

1. What does the Bible teach about receiving one into our ongoing fellowship who is known to teach doctrinal error? Is there a pattern?
2. What does the Bible teach about ongoing fellowship with one practicing sin? Is there a pattern revealed?

Fellowship & Doctrine

Bible Definition of “Doctrine”

- *didache* (διδάχη) - act of instructing *or* that which is taught; doctrine; teaching
- **Matthew 16:12** - of Pharisees & Sadduces
- **Revelation 2:14-15** - of Balaam & Nicolaitans
- **Acts 13:6-12** - note parallel terms
- **Romans 16:17** – results in “offenses” if action is contrary to it
- **2 John 9-11** - have not God if go beyond
- *Thus, teaching which brings sin if violated*

Context of 2 John 1-6

- Emphasis repeatedly placed on **truth**
- Love is seen as being “**in truth**”
- Christians know & abide in truth
- Walking in truth = keep commandments
- Truth or commandments specified as that received from God
- *Knowing & obeying truth is essential to our relationship with God & brethren*

Examining 2 John 9-11

- One going beyond doctrine of Christ
 - *one practicing sin*
- One not bringing doctrine of Christ
 - *one known by past action as teacher of error*
- One who aids erring teacher is partaker
 - *one who remains in fellowship with teacher of error*

Identifying Those Leading Astray: 1 John 2:18-26

- Warning given to identify “*antichrists*”
- Seen by erroneous doctrinal propositions
 - *went out from us = left truth which binds us*
 - *denied Jesus was the Christ*
- Truth identified as that “heard from the beginning”
- Emphasis of text is recognition of teaching which differs from revealed truth
- *Same would be true of any doctrinal error*

Proving Spirits & False Prophets: 1 John 4:1-6

- Spirits proved (tested) by words of prophet
- Specific doctrine given as test of whether one was “of God” or not
 - Proposition: “*Jesus Christ is come in the flesh*”
- Doctrine on this matter tested whether prophet would “abide in the doctrine”
- Any doctrine revealed in Bible is of the same nature

Identifying False Teachers: 2 Peter 2

Context Leading To 2 Peter 2

- **2 Peter 1:12**
 - introduces need for confidence in truth

- **2 Peter 1:13-15**
 - reader called to remember the testimony
- **2 Peter 1:16-21**
 - nature of apostles’ message was not fables, but eyewitness testimony inspired by God
- Emphasis is on need to hold the truth

Context Following 2 Peter 2

- **2 Peter 3:1-2**
 - called to remember words of the apostles
- **2 Peter 3:3-13**
 - reminded they would be judged by the word of God as delivered
- **2 Peter 3:14-18**
 - final warnings & exhortations based on word
- Focus on need to hold firmly to truth

Recognizing False Teachers

- Because their character was a threat? **NO!**
- *It was because they called people away from the message of truth into doctrines which result in souls being condemned*
- Error will generate further evil (2 Tim 3:13)
- However, beginning point of problem & place to stop damage is at first teaching
- “Who shall privily bring in...”
 - *would not still be undetected if full character of evil was already manifest, but still false teacher if character not yet apparent*

Emphasis of 2 Peter 2:1-3 is on DESTRUCTIVE Heresies
However, not all incorrect teaching is necessarily destructive

Nature of Destructive Heresy

- Teaching is not true
- If false idea put into practice, it would result in sin
- As a result of sin, the soul is destroyed
- **Hence, a destructive heresy**
- However, not all false ideas if put into practice would necessarily result in sin
- Notice statement from J.W. McGarvey:

“Shall we think, then, that every man who believes a lie in regard to God’s will shall perish? I think not. If a blind man is guided by another blind man along a smooth road, where there is no ditch, I don’t think either of them will fall into a ditch. It is only when there is a ditch in the way that they will fall into it. So, if this young prophet had been told to do almost any thing else than what he was told to do, we have no reason to think it would have been fatal. If, for example, the old prophet had said, An angel sent me to tell you to get from under this tree and run for your life, and not to stop until you get home, the young man would have been scared, and would have run himself out of breath; but the lion would not have killed him. In like manner, I can imagine a man believing some lies in religion, which, though they may injure him some, and I suppose there are very few that would not, might yet fall short of proving fatal to him” (J. W. McGarvey, *McGarvey’s Sermons*, Gospel Light, 1975, p. 333-4).

Emphasis of 2 Peter 2:1-3

- False teachers known by:
- “**Destructive** heresies”
- Those **destructive** heresies bring “upon themselves swift **destruction**”
 - note the **destruction** comes on the basis of the heresies before evil character is introduced
- “Their **destruction** slumbereth not”
 - beginning here, decline of false teachers is emphasized, but were false teachers earlier

False Prophets & False Teachers

- 2 Peter 2:1 parallels the two
 - if we see how false prophets were recognized, we will recognize false teachers
- Was “false prophet” a special label?
- How many times is phrase used in OT? **None!**
- How then do we find them? **One prophesying falsely was false prophet**

False Teachers Elsewhere

- **Colossians 2:8f - Ascetic Gnostics not of bad character**
- **Romans 16:17**
- **1 Timothy 1:18-20 & 2 Timothy 2:16-18**
- **Jude 3-4**
- *In each case, error taught was departure from truth & resulted in sin*

Who Are False Teachers?

- False teachers are recognized by false teaching - just like it sounds
- Efforts to narrow the meaning go hand in hand with willingness to compromise
- We must always rebuke error which leads to sin if put into practice
- Neither Jesus nor any apostle ever instructed a person or church to tolerate doctrinal error into our ongoing fellowship
- *It was always rebuked and purged!*

Fellowship & Practice of Sin

Situation: Adultery Tolerated (1 Corinthians 5)

- Case of “fornication” where man had his father’s wife (word “incest” not used)
- Church was proud of accepting the man though they should have been ashamed
- The man was lost & fit for destruction while practicing this sin
- The church was tolerating “wickedness” which could spread to others

Solution: Put Away Wicked (1 Corinthians 5)

- Told to put away the wicked man from among the congregation
- **Rule:** *“have no company with fornicators”*
- Same principle applied to those practicing other sins as well - *all sin is “wickedness”*
- Reason for the action at least three-fold
 - *show community that wickedness not tolerated*
 - *bring shame on sinner moving him to repent*
 - *keep the evil from permeating in congregation*

Situation: Walking Disorderly (2 Thessalonians 3)

- Disorderly were admonished in first epistle (1 Thess. 5:14)
- Continued to “walk disorderly and not after the traditions” received of the apostles
- Sinful practices of laziness & being busybodies are specified
- Practice stood condemned as being contrary to the commands of divine authority

Solution: Withdraw Yourselves (2 Thessalonians 3)

- Acting in the name of the Lord **required** them to *“withdraw from every brother that walketh disorderly and not after the traditions which they received of”* apostles
- Intended to shame the sinner to repentance
- Note: discipline was based on failure to obey divinely revealed truth
- ***Can one practice that which is contrary to divinely revealed truth & not be subject to same?***

Receive Him Not: The Pattern

- There is not one passage instructing us to tolerate those teaching doctrinal error or accept those practicing sin into ongoing fellowship
- Uniform teaching of commands, examples & necessary inferences instructs us not to tolerate such into our ongoing fellowship
- ***Hence, a clear and consistent pattern of divine authority exists which we must obey!***

Lesson #4

Receive the Weak (*Romans 14*)

*Are doctrinal differences & sinful practices included in Romans 14?
Are all differences equal in nature? Must we tolerate sin & error among us?*

Study of Context: *Romans 14*

Broader Context of Bible

- **Ephesians 5:11**
 - *Have no fellowship with works of darkness*
- **2 John 9-11**
 - *No fellowship with one going beyond doctrine of Christ in action, teaching or support*
- **1 Timothy 1:18-20; 2 Timothy 2:16-18**
 - *Reprove teachers of error who lead astray*
- **Jude 3-4**
 - *Contend for “the faith” when others oppose*

Broader Context of Romans

- Gospel declared to produce “obedience of faith among all the nations” (1:1-7)
- Gospel revealed righteousness of God & brings all to salvation by faith (1:16-17)
- No toleration for continued sin (6:1-23)
- No “provision for the flesh” (13:11-14)
- Must mark those causing divisions & offenses contrary to doctrine (16:17-19)

Basic Divisions of Romans 14 – Verses 1 & 2

Introducing the Problem

- **One brother was “weak in faith”**
 - *conscience forbade him from eating meat*
 - *probably one from Jewish background*
 - *not just kind of meat, but Gentile surrounding*
- **One brother had “faith to eat all things”**
 - *understood old regulations not now binding*
- **Instructed to “receive” one another**
 - *not for “passing judgment on his opinions”*
 - *phrase not referring to matters lacking clarity*
- **Note that KJV rendering (“doubtful disputations”) not meant as “gray area”**
 - *decision of scruples*” (ASV), “*passing judgment on his opinions*” (NASV), “*disputes over opinions*” (RSV), “*quarreling over opinions*” (NRSV) & “*arguing over his scruples*” (Phillips)

Basic Divisions of Romans 14 – Verses 3 to 12

Instruction to the Weak (Romans 14:3-12)

- *herb-eater told God receives meat-eater*
- *problem with scruple of conscience, not law*
- *weak of conscience not to condemn strong*
- *God received meat-eater in his practice*
- *regardless of the herb-eaters own thoughts about issue, God declared His acceptance of meat-eater as His servant*

Reasons for Weak to Receive Strong

- God received him while eating meat (3)
- Was servant of God in the action (4)
- God to make him stand in judgment (4f)
- Matter depended on full assurance of one's own mind (5)
- Strong engaged in his practice "unto the Lord" & with thanksgiving to God (6)
- No man has right to reject his brother in such matters which God has allowed (6f)
- Standard for judgment is God's prerogative

Basic Divisions of Romans 14 – From 14:13 through 15:2

Instruction to Strong (Rom. 14:13 - 15:2)

- *reaffirms fact that practice is inherently good*
- *not to put stumbling-block before the weak*
- *souls of brethren more important than liberty*
- *strong must seek after matters which edify*
- *private conscience always allowed before God*
- *strong must help bear the burdens of weak*

Responsibilities of Strong

- Not to despise the weak brother (3)
- Not to put a stumbling block in way (13)
- Love weak brother over liberties (15)
- Keep focus on kingdom, not physical (17)
- Seek for peace & edification of others (19)
- Don't destroy God's work for liberty (20f)
- Exercise liberty between self & God (21)
- Do not allow liberty to condemn self (21)

Nature of Strong Brother's Action

- God received him in the action (4)
- Done with full assurance of mind (5)
- Done unto the Lord (6)
- Done giving God thanks (6)
- “Nothing is unclean of itself” (14)
- Action was “good” (16)
- Serving Christ while engaged in it (18)
- “All things indeed are clean” (20)
- Called “strong” together with Paul (15:1)

Could Same Be Said Of One In Sin? *Let's try it out and see...*

Likewise Receive Homosexual?

- God receives homosexual in the action?
- Commit sodomy in full assurance of mind?
- Commit sodomy unto the Lord?
- Give thanks to God for sodomy?
- “No homosexuality is unclean of itself”?
- Homosexuality is “good”?
- Serving Christ while committing sodomy?
- “Sodomite relations indeed are clean”?
- Homosexual “strong” together with Paul?

Likewise Receive Adulterer?

- God receives adulterer in the action?
- Commit adultery in full assurance of mind?
- Commit adultery unto the Lord?
- Give thanks to God for adultery?
- “No adultery is unclean of itself”?
- Adultery is “good”?
- Serving Christ while committing adultery?
- “Adulteries indeed are clean”?
- Adulterer “strong” together with Paul?

Likewise Receive Social Drinker?

- God receives alcohol drinker in the action?
- Drinking beer in full assurance of mind?
- A shot of whiskey unto the Lord?
- Give thanks to God for liquor?
- “No moderate drinking is unclean of itself”?
- Drinking vodka is “good”?
- Serving Christ while drinking a martini?
- “Social drinks indeed are clean”?
- Social drinker “strong” together with Paul?

If One Does Not Fit, Neither Do The Others! *No Sinful Action In Romans 14*

Could Teacher Of Error Fit Text? *Let's try it out and see...*

Like Receiving Justifier of Abortion?

- God receives teacher in justifying abortion?
- Can justify abortion in full assurance of mind?
- Can teach propriety of abortion unto the Lord?
- May give thanks to God for abortion rights?
- “No abortion promotion is unclean of itself”?
- Justifying abortion is “good”?
- Serve Christ as preach tolerance of abortion?
- “Errors to tolerate abortion indeed are clean”?
- Abortion advocate strong together with Paul?

Like Receiving Justifier of Adultery?

- God receives teacher in justifying adultery?
- Free to preach error in full assurance of mind?
- May teach false theories unto the Lord?
- Can give thanks to God for error on D&R?
- “No error on D&R is unclean of itself”?
- Redefining adultery is “good”?
- Serve Christ as preach one covenant doctrine?
- “Errors to free guilty party indeed are clean”?
- False teacher “strong” together with Paul?

Same Principle in 1 Corinthians 8 - 10

- **8:4** One knows no idol is anything
- **8:7** Another views meat as worship to idol
- **8:8** Not better or worse by either practice
- **8:9f** Liberty must not be a stumbling-block
- **9:1f** Example given of apostolic liberty
- **10:1f** Danger of idolatry's influence in sin
- **10:23** Act may be lawful, but not edify
- **10:24f** Our liberty may be limited by one weakened to sin due to his wrong views

Comments from Brethren in Past

R. L. Whiteside

(A New Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome)

Said subject of chapter was "*a matter of opinion or indifference*" (pp. 268-269) or "*matter of indifference or of personal rights*" (p. 274)

"But it seems to me that this injunction against judging must be confined to such matters as Paul was discussing" (p. 271)

Moses Lard

(Commentary on Paul's Letter to Romans, 1875)

"These thoughts are his own private opinions respecting things about which there is no command. He, therefore, has the right to hold them without interference from others. The things which his thoughts respect are in themselves indifferent; and therefore the thoughts which relate to them are indifferent" (p. 413).

David Lipscomb

(A Commentary on the New Testament Epistles: Romans)

"The character of these questions is given in the following verses. They are questions concerning which God has given no teaching and which have no bearing on the character of man" (p. 243).

Bryan Vinson, Sr.

(Paul's Letter to the Saints at Rome)

"Now, if it was a matter of faith and authorized duty, instead of opinion and therefore a matter of indifference, such a qualification would not be proper" (p. 261).

A.W. Dicus

(A Brief Commentary on Paul's Letter to the Church at Rome)

"In this chapter he (Paul) deals with things or matters that are indifferent within themselves" (p. 99).

Recent Broadening of Romans 14

Ed Harrell in *Christianity Magazine*

- April 1989 (p. 6)
“Issue in Romans 14 is precisely the establishment of the right of brethren to differ in matters of ‘faith.’” Also appeals to “common sense” without “need of revelation”
- May 1989 (p. 6)
“It is obvious that Christians sometimes disagree about scriptural instruction, even in matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import.... That behavior, uniformly practiced throughout Christianity is, I believe, the issue addressed in Romans 14.”
- May 1990 (p. 6)
“Within certain limits, God grants to Christians the right to a private conscience in matters of ‘faith.’ I believe that right is discussed in Romans 14. However, whether or not one accepts my exegesis of that passage, honest minds must acknowledge the reality of a past and present Christian world that tolerates contradictory teaching and practice on important moral and doctrinal questions.”
- “The Bounds of Christian Unity” (17 articles)
- No correction or reproof stated by any editor

Bob Owen in Temple Terrace, FL

- *“I’m talking tonight about fellowshiping. And I’m doing it in a context of a series of discussions on the marriage question.”*
- *“So let me suggest in the Scripture there are some cases discussed in detail where brethren had some differences of conviction. They differed in their belief. They differed in their practice. And yet they not only could continue to fellowship, but they were taught by Paul, the Lord through Paul, that they should continue to fellowship.”*
- **Appealed to 1 Corinthians 8-10 and Romans 14**
- *“And many brethren today have come along and have said, “These passages can not be applied to any matter where the Scripture teaches on it.” The only thing that they, that this, these passages can be used to answer, are matters of indifference. Those are our terms. And I have heard this preached. I can show it to you in print and you can too. You know it. They say it’s only on matters of indifference.”*
- *“Now, I’m going to return momentarily to the marriage question.”*
- **Wrong passage!** Principles of Romans 14 not given to answer issues about divorce & remarriage

Lynn Trapp in *Sentry Magazine* (June 30, 1986)

- *“I need to add some additional remarks. I want my instrumental brethren to understand that I still recognize them as brothers in Christ, and in spite of what I consider their sinful practice, I believe God, not I, will be their judge. While I ask them to put aside their unauthorized practice for the sake of unity, I do not insist that they accept my conclusions unless they deem those to be scriptural. (There are preachers who insist that unity can be achieved only when those using the instrument accept the sinfulness of the instrument and repent of it. Those require perfect*

knowledge as a requisite for scriptural unity. That is contrary to Romans 14:1 which says we are to 'accept' the weak brother [and I presume that most non-instrumental preachers consider the instrumental brethren to be 'weak'] without 'passing judgement on his opinions.' The word for opinion in Romans 14 is a word which refers to 'wrong thinking' and thus would include matters which are deemed to be unscriptural.)

- When asked, brother Trapp could provide no lexicon giving the definition he stated
- Brother Trapp admits that the use of instrumental music in worship is sinful, then applies the solution given by the Spirit in Romans 14 which He only applied to matters involving no sin

Don Patton in Sermon on Romans 14

- Contrasted chart of 100 issues given below which are individual in nature with another chart listing 10 issues involving the congregation
- *"These are the things addressed in this chapter [Romans 14] for which there is no excuse when we have dissension and falling out among brethren regarding instructions."*
- Subjects on chart referred to by Don Patton:

Abortion	Dancing	Kneeling	Politics	Spanking
Baptismal Gar.	Dating Activity	Length of hair	Pray before Col.	Speed Limits
Bartending	Decro. Crosses	Length of skirts	Projectors	Sports Cars
Beards	Divorce	"Low" neckline	Square Dancing	Proms
Blackboards	Drive-ins	Majorettes	Stained Glass W.	Providence
Blue Jeans	Easter Eggs	Makeup	Public School	Steeple
Boxing	Evolution	Meeting Houses	Pulpit flowers	Sweat Suits
Brewery Work	Exposed Ankles	Mini Skirts	Race Rel.	Sweaters
Bulletins	Football	Moonlanding	Rebaptism	Swimming
Bussing	Girly Maz.	Movies	Recreation	T-shirts
Bustles	Guns	Mustaches	Rel. Papers	Television
Capital Punish.	Hair Styles	Novels	Rel. Schools	Ties
Carnal Warfare	Holding Hands	Obesity	Remarriage	Toupees
Carpet Color	Holidays	Pantsuits	Seat Cushions	Trick or Treat
Cheerleading	Home classes	Pedal Pushers	Shaving legs	Whistling
Christmas (Ind.)	Horse Racing	Dominoes	Social Drinking	Kissing
Coffee	Hunting	Ph. D.'s	Shorts	Winking
Cokes	Insurance	Piano (Ind.)	Women Working	Skating
Covering	Jack-O-Lanterns	Picture of Christ	Slavery	Xmas Trees
Dance Bands	John Burch Soc.	Playing Cards	Smoking	"X" for Christ

- How can differences over these matters be resolved by applying the principles of Romans 14?
- This teaching makes differences of doctrine analogous to differences involving no inherent sin

Such Teaching Of Error Is Real & Present Danger

Lesson #5

The Present Controversy

*What about past attempts to broaden fellowship - are they like the present?
Are present conflicts over fellowship just misunderstandings & misrepresentations?
What are the fundamental differences?*

Attempts in Bible Times to Justify a Broader Fellowship

Old Testament Efforts

- Efforts to broaden religious expression in idolatry was constant in Israelite history
- Tolerance of various sinful practices (including sodomy & adultery) took place repeatedly
- False prophets arose to justify the practice of the people as they remained in sin
- Acceptance of nations present in many ways
- **Solution: Correct it, not accept it!**

Case of Corinth (1 Corinthians)

- Some proud of accepting the adulterer
- Accepted women leaving their God-ordained role of submission
- Perversion of the Lord's Supper present
- Misuse of spiritual gifts was prevalent
- Tolerated error taught on the resurrection
- **Solution: Correct it, not accept it!**

Churches of Asia (Rev. 2 & 3)

- Two churches totally commended
- Other five rebuked for wrongs present
- Diversity of moral practice accepted
- Diversity of doctrine accepted
- Tolerant of those who had lost desire to serve the Lord zealously
- **Solution: Correct it, not accept it!**

Throughout the Bible...

- Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive teachers of error
- Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive practice of sin
- Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive diversity of morals
- Old or New Testament, no case of instruction to receive doctrinal diversity
- **Not even once! Always told to correct it!**

Other Attempts to Justify a Broader Fellowship

Instrumental Music & Societies

- In 1800's, some brethren founded the American Christian Missionary Society
- Also added instrumental music to the worship of the church
- Argument for broader fellowship made to those opposing these innovations
- Argument used then had several points...

Fellowship, Instruments & Societies

- Claims made for supporters of innovations
 - *men promoting such are honest & honorable*
 - *accepting them to preach doesn't condone all*
 - *if they come where others differ, they are not divisive with their views*
 - *matters lacked clarity (no specific prohibition)*
 - *we all tolerate some doctrinal disagreements*
 - *surely these matters could fit in Romans 14*
- Those tolerating such in their fellowship were swept into apostasy (e.g. Moses Lard)

Premillennialism

- In early 1900's, some taught Christ is not now King in His kingdom, but it is future
- Fulfilled prophecy perverted & applied to an earthly reign of Christ at end of time
- Denied the glory of church & made it only a temporary substitute for desired kingdom
- Many denied theory, but sought continued fellowship of premillennial advocates
- Arguments made then had several points...

Fellowship & Premillennialism

- Claims made for advocates of theories
 - *men promoting such are honest & honorable*
 - *accepting them to preach doesn't condone all*
 - *if they come where others differ, not divisive*
 - *matters lacked clarity*
 - *we all tolerate some doctrinal disagreements*
 - *surely these matters could fit in Romans 14*
- Those tolerating such in their fellowship were swept into apostasy (e.g. Goodpasture)

Institutionalism & Social Gospel

- Efforts to put college in the budget of local churches were early attempts at institutions

- Later, sought to emphasize orphan homes for emotional appeal generated
- Sponsoring church arrangements & various institutions all part of same centralization
- Church given social work (kitchens & gyms)
- Argument to tolerate practices in fellowship had several points...

Fellowship & Institutionalism

- Claims made for supporters of innovations
 - *men promoting such are honest & honorable*
 - *accepting them to preach doesn't condone all*
 - *if they come where others differ, not divisive*
 - *matters lacked clarity (no specific prohibition)*
 - *we all tolerate some doctrinal disagreements*
 - *surely these matters could fit in Romans 14*
- Tolerating such in fellowship led innovators into progressive apostasy now evident

Ed Harrell, *The Churches of Christ in the Twentieth Century: Homer Hailey's Personal Journey of Faith*, p. 186)

“Nonetheless, at the end of the sixties, dissent remained uncomfortable, even dangerous, in the churches of Christ. Many of those who wrote articles in *Voices of Concern* left the churches of Christ for friendlier environs. Richard Hughes described the flight of the 1960s: ‘As time went on, increasing numbers of these young people abandoned Churches of Christ for other more socially concerned, more ecumenical, and more spirit-filled Christian traditions. Many left organized Christianity altogether.’ Even in the 1990s, serious rebels pondered whether to remain a part of the churches of Christ or to leave and serve ‘God within another fellowship.’ Editor Denny Boultinghouse of *Image* magazine advised a young liberal in 1996, ‘I really hope you will be able to stay with us on the journey. It may be selfish, but we need more people like you.’

“Many young progressives did stay in the 1960s and 1970s and they ultimately dramatically influenced the churches of Christ. At the end of the sixties, Richard Hughes saw three groups within the mainstream: a broad center that ‘embraced some diversity’ but sought to ‘preserve the dominant vision of the 1950s’; a group of ‘progressives who challenged that vision’; and a ‘group of conservatives’ who ‘absolutized the historical vision of Churches of Christ’ and ‘claimed to understand absolute truth absolutely.’ The stage was set for a new struggle for the soul of the churches of Christ.”

Damage of “Progressives” Within

- Plea of institutional brethren was for all to accept practice of things lacking Bible authority
- Retained element in fellowship who sought more innovations
- New generation grew bolder in application
- Tolerance for unauthorized practice applied to instrumental music & sectarian errors
- Plea for fellowship extended to logical end
- Principle carried further than first teaching

Max Lucado & Fellowship

- Popular writer of mainstream institutional background; popular among evangelicals
- Advocate of broader fellowship to include denominations
- Preaches in San Antonio where church had joint worship with Baptists
- Spoke at 1995 Pepperdine Lectures

– *Eternal Truth: A Dream Worth Keeping Alive*

“What could Jesus do to extend a hand that was far greater than the canyon between a Baptist and a Church of Christ or a Methodist and a Church of Christ? What could Jesus do to extend a hand from Him who has never sinned to he who has done nothing but sin? ... Far greater than any canyon that you or I will ever bridge is the canyon that Christ bridged.... And my question is this: If Christ can do all that to accept us, can't we do something to accept His other children? ... Doesn't Christ accept us with all of our doctrinal misinterpretations and curiosities and peculiarities and unevenness? Can't we do the same for others? ... That's the reason we must accept one another. Not because they are right; not because we are right; but because He is right.”

Mark Henderson - '96 ACU Lecture: *People Need the Unity-Committed Church*

“Brothers and sisters, we do not have to live in estrangement and isolation from those who honestly differ with us inside or outside our fellowship. We don't have to agree with them on every point nor do we have to convince them to agree with us on every issue. All we have to do is look to our left, and everywhere we see one who has committed his or her heart and life to the Lordship of Jesus Christ we may rejoice that we have found a brother or sister. And we may extend to that child of God the same inviting hand of grace and acceptance which we ourselves have received from the Lord Jesus.”

How Is Such Defended By Institutional “Progressives”?

Rubel Shelly, Restoration Forum XII from “*Call to Action,*” A.C.U. (1995)

- “My comments here will be based on Romans 14:1 through 15:13. This section of Paul's most sublime epistle deals with doctrinal difference among baptized believers. Before attempting to apply anything from this block of text to our situation, I'll probably need to defend using it at all.”
- “The doctrine, I repeat, doctrine, held by either group was tolerable to Paul... The doctrine held by either group was tolerable to him, but the attitude displayed by both groups was intolerable to him.”
- “First, I believe we must accept one another as brothers beloved of God... ‘Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you in order to bring praise to God’ (Romans 15:7). We have believed on the same Christ and confessed that faith in the same symbolic act of baptism. We've been put into his one body, the church in that process. Like it or not, we're brothers and sisters in Christ. That brothers differ on the millennium, the work of the Holy Spirit, church organization, instrumental music, having a glass of wine, the role of women in church leadership, and a dozen, dozen other issues does not change the fact that they're all children of God.”
- “Second, I believe we must not only acknowledge one another as brothers in Christ, but be reconciled to one another without abandoning or compromising the first order truths of the gospel. That is, issues that relate directly to the meaning of Christ and his atoning death, we must stop labeling as apostate and withholding or withdrawing fellowship over second and third order truths. For me, a second order truth in the New Testament includes those discipleship issues such as drinking wine versus teetotalism. And third order truths would be group distinctives such as instrumental versus *a cappella* music.”
- “First order truth, that is truth that's critical truth, core truth about how one comes to know Christ. The second and third order truths, one need never come to a view on in order to be a Christian. On Pentecost, those people understood enough first order truth to accept Christ. They didn't have a position that day on whether to support Herald of Truth out of the treasury. They hadn't had time yet to debate whether or not now that we are Christians we can ever have a glass of wine with dinner. Wouldn't have occurred to them to bring up the matter of what kind of music we're going to have when we go to church Sunday.”
- “I need the experience of living in healthy tension with people around me whose points of view challenge my own, whose thinking is not a carbon copy of my own, but whose love for God and scripture is equally as emphatic as my own. I need brothers and sisters who challenge me on my views about divorce and remarriage, instrumental music,

the role of women, and the value of programs such as Christian Jubilee or the North American Christian Convention.”

• “Our congregations no more have to look alike and act alike than individual Christians have to look alike and act alike.”

• Closed with appeal, “May God help us to learn four things,” aiding fellowship with Christian Church. In each point, Shelly based his appeal on a misuse of Romans 14.

More Recent Digressions Among Brethren

Grace-Unity Movement of 1970’s

- Some among non-institutional brethren sought justification for broader fellowship
- Doctrinal attempts included *gospel/doctrine distinction, continuous cleansing & imputation of righteous life of Christ*
- Caused a large number to leave Lord’s body for institutionalism or denominationalism
- However, some of those remaining sought for greater tolerance of such based on the same old pleas made in previous digressions

Fellowship & “Grace-Unity”

- Claims made for those teaching error
 - *men promoting such are honest & honorable*
 - *accepting them to preach doesn’t condone all*
 - *if they come where others differ, not divisive*
 - *matters lacked clarity (not “core” truth)*
 - *we all tolerate some doctrinal disagreements*
 - *surely these matters could fit in Romans 14*
- Tolerating such in fellowship & condemning teachers of truth tied to apostasy now evident

Similarities in Each Case - Defend Broader Fellowship:

- Hold men in honor above truth
 - *esteemed brother is honest & honorable*
 - *therefore, cannot label him a “false teacher”*
- Redefine “fellowship” in concept & scope
- Claim matters at issue lack clarity
- Misuse Romans 14 to include sin & error
- Appeal to historical consistency

Same Elements Present Today Honoring Men Above Truth vs 1 Cor. 4:6

Origin of Current Controversy: Defend Fellowship w/ Homer Hailey

- In March 1988, brother Hailey publicly applied error on divorce & remarriage to a case of unlawful marriage in Belen, NM
- Other cases of such teaching became known in various places going back to 1958
- Brother Hailey made preparations for more public teaching including book manuscript
- Several brethren warned of coming error
- Defense made of continued fellowship with brother Hailey despite his error

Ed Harrell, *Christianity Magazine* (Nov. 88)

- “This, then, is my personal defense of Homer Hailey as a man who has earned the respect and esteem of the Christians of our time. Or, more accurately, it is my explanation of why Hailey has won wide esteem among Christians in spite of his views on the subject of divorce and remarriage. I confess that the recent personal attacks on him seem to me to be an unheroic assault on an 85-year-old warrior” (p. 6).
- “This article, then, is not a thorough discussion of the basis upon which we decide whether or not to ‘fellowship’ another Christian. It is an explanation of why I, and I presume those who are now attacking him, have ‘fellowshipped’ Homer Hailey for many years, in spite of his views on divorce” (p. 8).
- “Many congregations would not accept into their fellowship **the divorced persons** accepted by Hailey, and many would not invite **him to preach** because of the view that he holds. Other congregations would not accept **women who worship uncovered**. Other congregations are **more flexible on both** questions. There are now, and always have been, differences in the basis of local fellowships. It is perfectly proper that **some congregations have not, and would not, invite Homer Hailey to preach** because of the position that he holds on this subject. **Others, rightly I believe, have decided to use him in spite of the difference**” (p. 8).
- “Without pretending to exhaust the arguments on the subject of fellowship, I confess that consistency is a formidable reason why I can **work and worship with Homer Hailey in spite of our differences**” (p. 8).
- “If one is factious or schismatic, others should not tolerate his destructive teaching and conduct... **If brother Hailey should write a summary of his views on this subject**, I would regret that he might convert people to a view that I think is wrong. But I confess that I would read his work thoughtfully, as I listened to him on other subjects, and would try to answer him respectfully. **Nor shall I consider him an agitator and schismatic until he begins destroying the congregations across the country** that he has done so much to build. Finally, I find particularly offensive the easy use of the label ‘false teacher’ with reference to Homer Hailey. As I have already noted, the presumption that one becomes a ‘false teacher’ on the basis of holding one doctrine that I judge to be erroneous is loaded with consequences that none of us would accept. **A false teacher is surely one whose dishonest motives and/or ignorance distinguish him** from the sincere brother who has reached an erroneous conclusion” (p. 9).

Bob Owen, “We Differ, Can We Fellowship?” (Concord, NC)

“And frankly, brethren, there are some issues that are being discussed among the brethren today that have led to the extension of this discussion on fellowship tonight. And there are some brethren who almost want to do a litmus test. They pick a particular doctrine and if a preacher doesn't preach it the same thing that they believe on that particular doctrine, or if a congregation doesn't practice what they think it ought to be practicing on that, then they deem that preacher as unfaithful and that congregation as unfaithful. And that's wrong. That's detrimental.”

Question: “Answer this as you will. But in my reading from the Restoration Movement till this day, and from my practice, in being around preachers and people who preach, there have been people who differed on many things you said and it also includes the question of the marriage question and divorce and remarriage. History of our movement, over and over, it's been there. But yet for 20 years I've known that and worked with brethren who disagreed, believed different - brother Homer Hailey, is an outstanding example who has been a friend of mine for many years. And yet, within just a short time, recently, I just have people just asking that question, asking that question, what is it, ask, it seems like it doesn't matter about all the other things, but this is the thing that now there can be no differences in understanding on this question. Or am I just perceiving that or do I see that just having the monumental question right now? How do you deal with it?” (2/19/95 Sermon from Concord transcript, p.11).

Answer by Bob Owen: “Well, how I deal with it may not be satisfactory to anybody else. But that of course, is what I had in mind a moment ago when I used the expression, ‘a litmus test.’ In the last several years, *some*

brethren have focused on the divorce and remarriage issues. And have pushed it to the point that if anybody differs with them on that point, they not only say I don't agree with you, or I teach something different, but they're using this label, 'You become a false teacher.' The Bible uses that expression very sparingly. In 2 Peter 2, there's a whole chapter directed to some that are called 'false teacher.' But listen carefully. Everybody that teaches something that I think is false does not meet the description of these people in 2 Peter 2. Those false teachers in 2 Peter 2 were hypocrites, who would lie, who would deceive, they were people who took advantage of others for filthy lucre's sake. Whose role was to try to be divisive and to get their own personal aggrandizement. Now, I can't take everybody that teaches something that I differ with and say, 'He is a false teacher of the Bible definition of a false teacher.' These false teachers were like the false prophets, the false apostles. They were not just brethren who differed. **Now today, there are some people who differ over the question of divorce and remarriage. You mentioned brother Hailey.** He's one of my dearest friends. I communicate with him frequently. *And would love to sit at his feet right now and listen to him preach.* I differ with him on the issue of divorce and remarriage. He knows that. And I know it and he and I discussed it at length. But Homer Hailey is not a deceitful worker, going around with personal desire to be disruptive and to make gain of the brethren. Homer Hailey is not some hypocritical blasphemer, who rails at the dignity of God. And those are the descriptions of the false teacher in 2 Peter 2. I differ with brother Hailey on some issues on divorce and remarriage. And frankly, he could fellowship some people, some divorced people, that I couldn't fellowship. I'm an old time conservative on the divorce and remarriage issue. But a bunch of brethren have come along and they list me as a false teacher because I do not agree with them that I can't have any relationship with brother Hailey. Since we differ on the divorce question, they say, **if I have fellowship with him,** then I'm a false teacher on fellowship. And I've got to be marked and some are doing that publicly. I regret that but I'm not going to lose a lot of sleep over it. I'm gonna do what my conscience says ought to be done, what I believe the Bible teaches and let the Lord take care of the rest of it. Is the divorce thing a matter of, is it an issue? Sure it is. How should it be decided? Let me tell you how it ought to be decided. **Every local congregation is going to take each individual case and pass its own judgment what would be the impact in this congregation if we accept that couple. If it's going to be harmful to the group, then that group, they ought not accept them.** And there are some people who have been very critical of brother Hailey and I agree with those people who are critical of him on the Bible teaching with regard to divorce and remarriage. But I differ with them on their **interpretation and application of the fellowship issue.**"

- This is not a misunderstanding nor is it a misrepresentation of one's teaching
- His own words show that brother Owen is justifying a non-biblical fellowship

"No Practical Difference Now"

- Some claim no practical difference exists after brother Hailey wrote book (1991)
- Say they will not ask him to preach now
- However, Bob Owen's sermons (93 & 95) were given after brother Hailey's book
- Earl Kimbrough paper was written after brother Hailey's book
- Ed Harrell's book published in 2000
- Will these brethren affirm the following?
 - *"Homer Hailey teaches error which causes souls to be lost in hell & may not scripturally be received into fellowship by faithful brethren"*

Redefining Fellowship in Content & Scope

vs

2 Corinthians 6:14 - 7:1; 2 John 9-11; Romans 16:17

Attempts to Redefine Fellowship

- Some say we need not agree on doctrinal principles to have fellowship

- Some say we may have fellowship in areas where we act together without endorsing all
- Some have define “fellowship” as dealing solely with action in a local church
- Some now use term “association” to avoid defense of “fellowship” per Bible use, yet defend actions involved in “fellowship”

Claims That Matters At Issue Lack Clarity

vs

Ephesians 5:17, 2 Peter 1:3 & 2 Timothy 3:16-17

View Stated & Applied

“I do not regard Homer Hailey as a false teacher, even though I believe him to be wrong in his interpretation of Matthew 19 (as he believes me to be wrong about Christians serving in the military), because I am persuaded by his conduct and his arguments that he honestly believes that he is faithful to God’s teaching on the subject. Neither of us would fellowship a **clear adulterer**, but, at least for the time being, we entrust the judgment of one another’s conscience on this question to God.”

“Each of these judgments is based on an admission that we regard the subject as **sufficiently lacking in clarity** to accept a brother who disagrees with us.... **We are making verdicts about clarity and honesty of intent.** Let me be clear about clarity. **My conclusion about the clarity of a passage involves both how clear it seems to me and also of those who disagree with me.**

It is that distinction that separates a weak brother from a false teacher. A false teacher is either ignorant (II Pet. 3:5; Rom. 10:3), deluded (I Tim. 4:2; Rom. 1:21-23; II Thess. 2:11) or a deceiver (II Pet. 2:1-3) -- he is not honestly mistaken about God’s clear instruction.”

Ed Harrell, “Divorce & Fellowship,” Florida College forum manuscript (1991), pp. 10-11

Misuse Romans 14 to Include Sin & Error

vs

Romans 14:1 - 15:3

Nature of Action to be Received

- God receives the action (4)
- Done with full assurance of mind (5)
- Done unto the Lord (6)
- Done giving God thanks (6)
- Limited to that not “unclean of itself” (14)
- Action must be inherently “good” (16)
- Can serve Christ while engaged in it (18)
- Among “all things indeed are clean” (20)
- If still “strong” together with Paul (15:1)

Appeal to Historical Consistency

vs

1 Peter 4:11 & Colossians 3:17

Arguments Based on History

- Ed Harrell's articles in *Christianity Magazine*
 - “It is obvious that Christians sometimes disagree about scriptural instruction, even in matters of considerable moral and doctrinal import”
- Bob Owen sermons in Temple Terrace, FL
 - *Earl Kimbrough material commended; historical case for tolerance of divorce & remarriage errors*
- Samuel Dawson booklet mailed over country
 - also in *Fellowship with God & His People*
- How many other applications? (e.g. Gen. 1&2)

How Far Will This Go?

- If willing to put divorce & remarriage into broader fellowship, accepting adultery
- What will be the problem tolerating...
 - *Gambling*
 - *Social drinking*
 - *Immodest dress*
 - *Dancing*
- Opening door for non-literal interpretation of creation opens full door to new hermeneutic

2 John 9-11: Whether Historically Accepted or Not, Bible Still Condemns...

- Anyone going beyond doctrine of Christ
 - *one practicing sin*
- Anyone not bringing doctrine of Christ
 - *known teacher of error*
- Anyone who aids teacher of error

Lesson #6

Application & Conclusions

What determines the answer: Local church or truth? Subjective or objective?

Attempt to Connect Autonomy & Fellowship

- Some are suggesting that two churches may legitimately make opposite decisions regarding those received into fellowship
- Local church autonomy is cited as reason
- Idea is that decisions regarding fellowship are **subjective** rather than **objective**
- Let's examine Bible doctrine of autonomy & specific teaching of error on this issue

Understanding Bible Teaching on Autonomy

- Term not used in NT, but concept is taught
- *1 Peter 5:1-2*
- *Acts 20:28*
- Elders of a local church have responsibility of overseeing limited to that local church
- Oversight limited to matters authorized - Others not permitted to assume oversight
- **Principle: No autonomy to do what there is no authority to do**

Defining the Issue

- The issue regarding autonomy is **not**:
 - *May outsiders dictate decisions to local elders?*
 - *May others enforce fellowship decisions?*
 - *May preachers or papers take control of decisions on fellowship or other matters?*
- No case of attempt to justify such is present
- The differences at issue are these:
 - *May brethren from one church **teach** members of another church about current issues?*
 - *May brethren **rebuke** wrong wherever seen?*

Case of Acts 15

- Doctrinal difference present within church at Jerusalem over binding of old law
- Teachers of error had gone out from them
- Truth declared to those at Jerusalem
- Letter sent to brethren in other churches regarding the truth about this issue (22-29)
- Messengers sent to preach truth orally (27)
- Done without request of those to receive the letter and the preaching on the issue

Objection: “No Apostles Now”

- **God does not use a wrong method to deliver a right message**
- Elders at Jerusalem were also involved
- Apostolic uniqueness seen in inspired revelation & miraculous confirmation
- Neither apostles or prophets given special office to oversee church universal
- Teaching done was inspired in origin
- **Method & content** were to be imitated

Imitation of Apostolic Example

- **1 Corinthians 4:16-17**
 - “put you in remembrance of my ways”
 - “as I teach everywhere in every church”
- **Philippians 3:17-19**
- **Galatians 1:6-9**
 - 1 Timothy 1:18-20
 - 2 Timothy 2:16-18
 - 2 Timothy 4:10, 14-15

Unintended New Hermeneutic

- If those who say we cannot teach as apostles taught are right, note the consequence
- We have taught that “approved apostolic example” establishes authority for a practice
- If we cannot act as apostles did since we are not inspired, effect is to reverse principle
- **New hermeneutic: If the apostles did it, we cannot do it!**

Case of Colossians 2:1-8

- Paul defended truth to another church though not a member there
- Warned of specific doctrinal errors which were contrary to the faith received
- Paul did not depend on his place as an apostle, but on revealed truth
- If we have revealed truth & see doctrinal error across town today, can we ignore it?
- **No, we must follow apostolic example**

Case of Revelation 2 & 3

- John gave specific teaching related to seven churches and dealt with their problems
- John defended the truth showing wrong of sinful practices & doctrinal errors of each
- All churches read that written to others

- Though specific problems were not in each church, teaching prevented spread of wrong
- *No violation of autonomy to rebuke error in another place & allow others to hear*

Case of Acts 18:27

- Brethren in Ephesus wrote disciples in Achaia to “receive” Apollos
- They knew of Apollos’ faithfulness & they loved their brethren in Christ in other places
- No violation of autonomy occurred
- *Thus, it is authorized for brethren to state faithfulness of brother to those elsewhere*
- Any difference in principle if a brother’s **unfaithfulness** was stated? *No!*

Case of 3 John 1-12

- Gaius & Demetrius commended for walking in truth and leading others to it
- Gaius instructed to aid worthy brethren in their work of spreading truth (fellowship)
- Diotrephes condemned for sinful actions including improper fellowship
- John rebuked such, though not member there
- *No violation of autonomy to rebuke unlawful fellowship & practice in another church*

Statements of Concern about Autonomy & Fellowship

Marshall Patton, Patton-Osborne Debate on Romans 14, Faith & Facts (Jan. 91), pp. 33-34.

“Whether or not Romans 14 should be applied to actual cases of the marital issues is more involved (having many ramifications) than can be handled in two or three paragraphs. It really is another subject. It certainly will take more than some arbitrary assertions and inflammatory remarks conducive to fanning into a roaring flame a party spirit.... In the final analysis each local church will have to handle its own problem in the light of its knowledge of truth. This calls for respect for that which God ordained - congregational autonomy! Keeping our problems where God put them, instead of making them brotherhood problems, would solve and preclude a lot of our trouble.”

Steve Dewhirst, “Church Autonomy,” Sentry Magazine (June 30, 1993)

- “This concept is pretty fundamental, yet religious men have always struggled against it. We’re not generally contented to mind our own business. We want to know what everybody else is doing. We find it extremely difficult to allow someone else to ‘walk by faith’ if his application of faith is different from ours. History bears out our shortcomings. Man has consistently clamored for uniformity rather than autonomy, and has sometimes gone to extremes to attain it. Witness the Inquisition, for example. All Catholic churches, and individuals, were to conform to the official norm... or else. And history also demonstrates that those who have clamored loudest for uniformity - under the guise of ‘scripturalness’ - have actually had an ulterior motive: *POWER*. He who sets the standard and forces conformity rules his peers” (p. 1).

- “Our brethren have not been untouched in this lust for power, prestige, and influence. Religious papers and self-important preachers have meddled repeatedly in the affairs of autonomous congregations over the years. In the last century, the promotion of instrumental music and the missionary society was pushed more by papers than anyone else... and people listened. In the early days of the institutional controversy, papers like the *Gospel Advocate* practically ordered churches to fire those preachers who were in opposition... and people listened. As if a paper has the right to order anyone, let alone a local church! And in our day, papers are often eager to tell us with whom we may or may not have fellowship ... and people are still listening. The fault not only lies with brethren enamored of themselves, but with brethren who refuse to accept the burden of self-determination as an autonomous church family” (pp. 1-2).

• “AUTONOMY AND CONTROVERSY

Because the very definition of *autonomy* is *self-governing* or *independent*, each local church must deal with controversy in its own way. There can be no ‘brotherhood norm’ to which we yield, else we give up autonomy in favor of sectarianism. We are only obligated to the ‘norm’ of Scripture. If our response to controversial issues is to simply imitate other churches, we are not walking by faith” (p. 2).

• “We have never seen a shortage of controversial questions. Our brethren have wrestled with instrumental music, the missionary society, premillennialism, the sponsoring church arrangement, church-sponsored recreation, the covering, the war question, the number of cups in the Lord’s supper, the Bible class question, the gift of the Holy Spirit, marriage and divorce, and even the Deity of Jesus while on earth. There’s no end. And these controversies are not altogether bad. They demonstrate that we’re still studying independently and endeavoring to walk by faith, instead of blindly following a predetermined sectarian creed. And yet the very controversies that can help churches assert autonomy, can contain a trap as some brethren insist on exploiting controversy to demand ‘brotherhood’ uniformity” (p. 2).

• “No individual has the right to meddle in the affairs of an autonomous congregation. Period.... When calls come from ‘concerned brethren’ across the country about which preacher should/should not be hired, or who should conduct a gospel meeting, such brethren have jumped from propriety to politics. And sadly, many churches have yielded to such intimidation either trying to ‘avoid trouble’ or to avoid being labeled ‘unsound’ by self-appointed doctrinal arbiters. But who’s really to blame? Surely, brethren who cannot discern between themselves and inspired apostles will give account to the Lord. But so will weak-kneed brethren in local churches who allow themselves to be corralled like mindless cattle!” (p. 3).

Bob Owen, “We Differ, Can We Fellowship?” Concord, NC - 2/19/95

“Is the divorce thing a matter of...is it an issue? Sure it is. How should it be decided? Let me tell you how it ought to be decided. Every local congregation is going to take each individual case and pass its own judgment what would be the impact in this congregation if we accept that couple. If it’s going to be harmful to the group, then that group, they ought not accept them” (p. 8 of manuscript).

Bob Owen, Sermon on “Fellowship” at Temple Terrace, FL (9/2/93)

“Brethren, there are some Bible cases that demand withdrawal of fellowship. And I think we can draw the principles of that from those Bible cases. In 1 Corinthians 5, the familiar case, a man had his father’s wife. Here was a case of incest. Don’t make too much of my statement right now, please. This was not a matter, that somebody thought maybe that marriage is not really right in the sight of God. This was an open and shut case of outright fornication, openly being practiced. It was so open, that Paul says in verse one, it is named that there is fornication among you and such that is not even practiced among the Gentiles. Even the world wouldn’t sanction what this fellow was doing. And the world’s not our standard, God is. But there are some things that are wrong in the sight of everybody.... Paul is talking about a situation of immorality that was a clear- cut case of ignoring the principles of God and living in such a way that even the world knew it was wrong. Now, is incest or fornication the only thing that you can learn from that? No, later he expands the list. If any man that’s named a brother be a fornicator or an idolater, or a covetous or, so on. But all the things named there, I believe are a kind of thing that fall in this avenue of moral issues. Paul did not say if any brother is doing anything that you think is wrong. It’s a matter of fact over in 1 Corinthians 15 he’s going to talk about - pardon me, in 2 Corinthians, he’s going to talk about some brethren in the church at Corinth who were in fornication. And Paul was saying, I hope they correct that before I get there and so I don’t have to come to them with a stick. Don’t interpret that to say you’re suppose to ignore fornication. That’s not what Paul was doing. But every case didn’t get the identical treatment. This one, he said, withdraw your fellowship from him. Here was an open case of immorality. And if a church harbored somebody doing that, it would destroy the influence of the church, even in the eyes of the world. Shame the church in the eyes of the world” (p. 6 of manuscript).

Bob Owen, “We Differ, Can We Fellowship?” Concord, NC - 2/19/95

Question: “Not to continue this forum, in the sense of a marriage, divorce and remarriage issue... (Bob Owen: Good.) But in what we learned today, about things being individual versus being with the group, is that, is there some cloudiness there, or some gray areas there which brethren who ever have problems with other brethren that it can’t make that distinction?”

Answer by Bob Owen: “I think there is. And some have read 1 Cor. 5 and have said, ‘Now look, here's what the Bible says. Here's a man in adultery, you've got to withdraw from him.’ Look at the case. It was not just something where you and I might conclude that his marriage was not valid. It was a matter that here was a person who was openly living in an adulterous situation, incest. An open and shut case of adulterous behavior. It'd be like somebody who made no claim to be married; they're just sleeping together. Now to come along and say, ‘Okay, now, here's somebody who's got a marriage problem and we have concluded that their marriage is not valid therefore we have concluded that they are guilty of fornication.’ I can make that conclusion. Is that the same thing as the incestuous in 1 Cor. 5? I don't believe it is” (p. 9).

Bob Owen, Sermon on “Fellowship” at Temple Terrace, FL (9/2/93)

“Let me tell you where the answer lies as I understand it. And that is, each local congregation has the responsibility of passing its judgment and making its decisions on each individual Christian and each individual case on marriage or the other questions that are involved. And although there is nothing in the world wrong with teaching something publicly and saying, ‘Here's what I believe and here's why I believe.’ There's nothing wrong in writing it, and putting it in a gospel paper. But brethren, let's never forget God organized us congregationally. And the application of these principles has to be made on a congregational basis. Let's carefully avoid the concept of brotherhood decisions, brotherhood fellowship and brotherhood directors, and stay with what the Scripture teaches in our duties and responsibilities” (p. 8 of manuscript).

Slide into Subjective Thinking

- Premise given that fellowship is determined by local autonomy, not solely by truth
- Suggest some sin & errors not clear enough for all to understanding alike
- Then, legitimize differing principles and applications in local fellowships
- Local church & elders given place of judges rather than applying the divine standard
- *No stop sign on that road to digression!*

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