

HOME BIBLE STUDY SERIES

A Study on
FELLOWSHIP

- 1—Fellowship With Christians
- 2—Limited Fellowship
- 3—How Fellowship is Expressed
- 4—The Issue of Open Fellowship
- 5—Withdrawing of Fellowship
- 6— Fellowship Restored

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Lesson One

"Fellowship With Christians"

One of the great themes of Christianity is that of **Fellowship!** The Bible reveals God's eternal plan to save people from their sins and from eternal death. No religious document in the world has a concept like this! But it is even more than being saved...it is to share in a common fellowship of believers. In striving to define this term, it becomes quite obvious from Scripture that there is something very special about this fellowship.

DEFINED

The basic word in the Greek is "Koinonia." Simply defined it means to share something in common with others. Synonyms help to add to a definition of this term, such as: **joint participation, mutual sharing, association, communion, agreement, companionship, etc.** It is to appreciate the company and companionship of one another. But these terms do not fully describe the beauty and desirability of the Christian's Fellowship!! There is possibly no greater enriching friendship than that of Christians. They have given up family and friends to be a part of such a fellowship. The first Christians seem to have grasped this beauty when it states ***"they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers."*** (Acts 2:42). Also notice the actions of these people as recorded in Acts 2:43-47).

THINGS SHARED

When we look at what we share in common, it helps to show the real concept of fellowship:

1. We share a common heavenly Father. (1 Jn. 1:3, 5-7).
2. We share a common Savior or Redeemer. (1 Jn. 1:3).
3. We share a common Salvation. (Rom. 6:16-18; Jude 3).
4. We share a common Faith. (Tit. 1:4).
5. We share a common Hope. (Rom. 8:22-24).
6. We share a common Mission. (Matt. 28:18-20).

Other things could be mentioned, but these will help us to see what a great fellowship that we have to enjoy and profit by. It is a spirit of partnership where we are striving, working, giving, and experiencing things "hand-in-hand!" In this fellowship, there is no room for selfishness or division, but a harmonious interaction with one another. We need to come to fully understand, appreciate, and experience the fullness of this fellowship in Christ Jesus!

The fellowship of Christians is a sharing of our "like precious faith!" It is to gain strength from one another. It is to *"weep with those who weep; and rejoice with those who rejoice."* (Rom. 12:15). See also Rom. 12:9-21 to get the full picture of what it means to be in fellowship with Christians, as well as with Deity.

FELLOWSHIP WITH DEITY

It is important that mankind understands that to have "Christian Fellowship" we must first of all have fellowship with God—or become a Christian. Certainly, a person can have some kind of "fellowship" with other people—and even with Christians, even though he may not be a Christian. But such fellowship is not the same as what the Bible talks about—and especially the fullness of this fellowship.

Fellowship with Deity begins when one becomes a Christian. He is alienated from God because of his sins (1 Jn. 3:4; Rom. 5:6-11). God cannot condone sin and can have no fellowship with sin. Until a person's sins have been forgiven, he or she cannot be in true fellowship with Deity. (1 Jn. 1:5-7). When he sincerely turns to God and is forgiven, he is given God's favor and fellowship. It is important that men realize that they cannot cleanse themselves from their past sins—only God can do this. Man's redemption has been made possible through the death of Jesus as a perfect sacrifice for sin (Heb. 9:14). The preaching of the Gospel is God's way to not only tell man that He wants to save him, but also it is to motivate him to turn to God (Eph. 2:8-9). Jesus paid the price, but we must want what He has to offer—eternal life and fellowship with God. Several terms are used to describe what takes place between God and man:

1. ATONEMENT. Covers our sins by His shed blood.
2. RECONCILIATION. To bring two together who have been estranged by sin.
3. REDEMPTION. This is to buy back one who had been sold into the slavery of sin.
4. JUSTIFICATION. To pronounce a person as **just** who was formerly **unjust**. Jesus paid the price for our deliverance.
5. SANCTIFICATION. It is to be cleansed and set apart for holy service.
6. PROPITIATION. This is the removal of wrath by the offering of a gift. God's wrath against sin (Rom. 1:18) has been removed by Jesus. Thus we can have fellowship with God.

Both God and man play a role in bringing man back to God. Neither can do for the other what must be done in order for man to be saved and have fellowship with God (1 Jn. 1:5-7). God has done His part well—now it is up to man to do his part. His mind must be convinced that:

1. Jesus died in order to pay our debt;

2. That we have responsibilities to perform by our faith in order to have this fellowship—Repentance, Confession of Christ as Lord, Baptism into Christ. (Lk. 13:3; Acts 2:38; Rom. 10:9-10; Mk. 16:15-16).
3. We also must be convinced that Jesus rose from the dead to give up hope of a resurrection unto Eternal Life. (1 Cor. 15:20-23).

It is when we become obedient unto God that we can come into this great fellowship with not only Deity, but the Church as well. This is a unique fellowship that we have with God and with one another. It is a great privilege and a very significant event in history when we become a part of such a fellowship.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Fellowship with Christians is to share with each other our common faith in Christ Jesus. It is the joining together of our hands in service to God and man; but more, it is the joining together of our hearts. Our motives are the same. Our aims, goals, and purposes are ONE. Our souls are knit together like David and Jonathan's. In a world of "darkness", we are in fellowship with people of "light!" It is definitely more than just a tangible membership in a club of religious people!

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

TRUE OR FALSE

- ___ 1. Fellowship with Christians is definitely something that is unique.
- ___ 2. "Koinonia" is to share something in common with others.
- ___ 3. A simple definition of fellowship cannot fully describe what such a fellowship means.
- ___ 4. It took quite a while for the early Christians to understand what true fellowship with Christians was like.
- ___ 5. Only Christians can have fellowship with other Christians.
- ___ 6. Fellowship with God has to come first before we can have fellowship with our fellow-man.
- ___ 7. A person cannot have fellowship with God unless he becomes a Christian or is saved.
- ___ 8. God's part in mankind's redemption is to not only make justification possible through Christ, but to also motivate people to want to come into fellowship with God.
- ___ 9. Man's part in his redemption is to put faith in what God has done by being obedient to the Gospel of Christ.
- ___ 10. God Alone is able to bring man into fellowship with Himself.

Lesson Two

"Limited Fellowship"

All of life is sharing! We have to share various things with all kinds of people—roads, water, food, clothing, etc. All of us have all kinds of fellowship—family, friends, classmates, clubs, work, etc. But we have limitations that we place on such things, if it is within our power to do so. To be "exclusive" is represented as "bigotry," "narrow-mindedness," and "arrogance." If you limit your fellowship with certain people, you can be accused and even sued for wrongful actions. Yet, all people (to some degree or another) limit their fellowship with others. Just the very factor of time or opportunities can cause us to limit our fellowship. But all of this is looking at fellowship from a human (this world) viewpoint.

The Bible does indicate that Christians are to be limited in their fellowship with certain people or activities. It is obvious that no one is to be barred from fellowship with Christians due to ethnic, economic, or societal barriers because the Gospel is for all people (Matt. 28:18). Yet, no one is to be embraced by the church except those who are in fellowship with God. Fellowship has its limits, and those limits define the exclusive nature of the Church. The Bible sets the boundaries of fellowship and no one has the right to exclude a person whom God has included; but, neither can anyone whom God has excluded can be included by the Christian (2 Thess. 2:14-15).

AREAS OF LIMITATION

1. Specific doctrinal statements serve as boundaries of fellowship for the Christian. All who "**walk in the light**" of Jesus' teaching and example are to be in fellowship with one another (1 Jn. 1:6-7; Jn. 8:12). Those who "**walk in darkness**" are not to be given unlimited fellowship (1 Jn. 1:5-7). Neither are those who "**walk after the flesh**" to be given unlimited fellowship. Various terms are used to indicate this limitation of fellowship as well:

1. "**right hand of fellowship**" (Gal. 2:9)
2. "**Greet one another with a holy kiss**" (Rom. 16:16)
3. "**You cannot partake of the Lord and the cup of demons; you cannot partake of the Lord's table and of the table of demons.**" (1 Cor. 10:14-22).
4. "**If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him...**" (2 John 9-11).
5. "**Fellowship in the gospel**" (Phil. 1:3-6). This limitation would be only by time or ability—otherwise, it is unlimited.

6. **"There is one body and one Spirit"** (Eph. 4:3-6). The "seven" oneness are specifically given to show the limitation of the Christian's fellowship with other people. To deny any one of these would destroy the unity of the body and undermine the Truth for which the Church stands.
7. **"Not to keep company with sexually immoral people."** (1 Cor. 5:1-9).
8. **"Delivered unto Satan that they may learn not to blaspheme."** (1 Tim. 1:20).
9. **"Let everyone who names the name of Christ depart from iniquity."** (2 Tim. 2:17-19).
10. **"Commandments we gave you through the Lord's Jesus"** (2 Thess. 4:1-8)

There are some very pointed statements indicating the limiting of fellowship, not only with non-Christians, but with those who claim to be Christians but walk in unfruitful works of darkness (Eph. 5:11; 1 Tim. 5:22; 1 Cor. 15:33). This does not mean that every time someone sins that he is automatically to be excluded from the body of Christ (Church). It is when one persists in sin and is rebellious that he is to be excluded. The Apostle Paul worked with the Church at Corinth for some time and finally had to draw a line because of ethical or immoral sins. He promised that he would discipline those who refused to repent of their sins (2 Cor. 12:21). The Church needs to maintain its moral image even in the midst of an immoral world. It must not continue to extend its fellowship to those "in Christ" who have refused their admonitions to repent of practices clearly violating the teachings of Scripture. Such people who are entangled again in sin are compared to a dog that returns to its vomit or to a sow once washed who returns to wallowing in the mud (2 Pet. 2:20-22). God does not have fellowship with such—and neither should the faithful Christian.

Our fellowship with God is built around the teachings of the Gospel of Christ. Our fellowship with fellow Christians should be built on the same thing. This fellowship with one another should be characterized by love, peace, mutual understanding, and toleration of opinions. When different teachings are introduced into the body of Christ, it brings strife, separation, or division that leads to a destruction of the body (its fellowship). (Rom. 16:17). We are to exclude or avoid those who create divisions for their own advantage. Unity of the "Body" is more important than anyone's personal opinions.

In dealing with the question of fellowship, it is necessary that we make certain judgments based on our knowledge of God's Word and of our observations of others. Because we are human beings who cannot judge the hearts of other people, we will not always know when people are living in sin, and we will sometimes make mistakes about extending or not extending our fellowship to certain individuals. We can, however, observe the overt actions of other people or listen to what they have to say in order to draw our conclusions about such. When we

see those things that are clear violations of Biblical teachings, we have a responsibility to address those issues in our brothers' and sisters' lives with humility and gentleness (1 Cor. 5; Gal. 6:1-2; Jas. 5:19-20).

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

The limit of our fellowship with God and with one another is as wide as the grace of God extends and the blood of Christ cleanses (1 Jn. 1:7). We should not refuse to extend fellowship based on disagreements over matters of judgment. We must not refuse to extend fellowship based on opinions or practices that violate "tradition" but not Scripture. The Kingdom of God is big enough for many cultural traditions, races, and different social strata. To ensure the preservation of fellowship among God's people, we need to emphasize:

1. Christ;
2. His Death, Burial, and Resurrection;
3. His Lordship over our lives;
4. His grace and to be sure we are standing in such;
5. And to teach the great truths of the Word of God.

We need to know the difference between disagreeing over certain issues on which Scripture does not speak and refusing to have fellowship with those who are cleansed by Christ's blood. (Rom. 14:1; 15:7). On the other hand, we need to recognize clear violations of the direct teachings of Scripture and refuse to be partners in such violations.

Our challenge is not to try to make our circle of fellowship so small that we exclude people with whom God associates. At the same time, we must not expand our circle of fellowship so widely that we deceive the lost into thinking they are saved. This is no simple challenge, but with God's Word as our guide and God's grace as our help, we will deliver our souls.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. Everyone enjoys some kinds of and a certain amount of fellowship with others.
- ___ 2. Everyone is limited to the amount of fellowship they can have by time and opportunity only.
- ___ 3. It is correct to bar someone from our fellowship because of their ethnic, economic, or societal backgrounds.
- ___ 4. Doctrinal statements in Scripture serve as a limitation of fellowship for the Christian.
- ___ 5. Morality is also a basis for limitation of fellowship.

- ___ 6. The person who persists in sin and is rebellious should be excluded from the fellowship of faithful Christians.
- ___ 7. When different teachings are introduced into the fellowship of Christians, it can bring a more tolerant spirit within the group.
- ___ 8. It is necessary that Christians make certain judgments about the limiting of fellowship with other Christians.
- ___ 9. It is necessary at times to draw lines of fellowship over matters of opinion.

- ___ 10. It is possible to widen our fellowship to the point that we can deceive people into believing they are right with God—when they are not!

Lesson Three

"How Fellowship is Expressed"

Fellowship is something that has to be shown or expressed in word or deed! Without such, there is no true fellowship! The very nature of the words that are used to indicate such infers action—**participation, sharing together, partnership, communion**, etc. It is the giving of something or the sharing of something with others. Fellowship is the "joint action" of two or more persons toward the accomplishing of a common goal.

The first Church (Jerusalem) helps to illustrate this clearly.

1. They held to a few basic Gospel truths that they had heard and obeyed (Acts 2:14-41). This brought them into a "special" fellowship with those who had believed and obeyed the same teachings.
2. They continued in this fellowship by coming together to be continually taught the "Apostles' Doctrine." (Acts 2:42).
3. They continued worshipping together. (Acts 2:42, 46).
4. They shared physical necessities with one another. (Acts 2:44-45). Many sold possessions to make this sharing possible.
5. They ate their food together. (Acts 2:46).

The outcome of these fellowship activities is also seen.

1. It brought gladness and sincerity of heart to all of them (Acts 2:46)
2. They were having favor with all the people. (Acts 2:47)
3. The Lord kept adding to their number daily those who were being saved. (Acts 2:47).
4. It provided great opportunities to preach to the people around them. (Acts 4:29-31).
5. They were persecuted by hypocritical religious leaders that actually brought their fellowship closer together. (Acts 4:16-23, 32-35).

It would seem obvious that when people are happy, at peace, and supportive of one another, it will not go unnoticed by those around them. But the opposite would also be true. People need to see love expressed in joyful sharing of activities among themselves.

DISAGREEMENTS AND FELLOWSHIP

Disagreements can be a **threat** to the fellowship of the group if not carefully handled by the leadership. Such occurred in the Jerusalem Church, as recorded in Acts 6:1-7. It seems that the Hebrew widows were being taken care of, but the Hellenists (Grecian Jews??) widows were being neglected in the daily distribution.

The complaint was expressed to the Apostles, who in turn ask the congregation to appoint capable men to see after the matter. The problem was solved quickly and the fellowship continued among the brethren. But what would have happened if the Apostles ignored the situation? Or what would have happened if an unloving brother criticized the complainers for taking up the time of the church to deal with material matters.

Another example of disagreement is recorded in Acts 15:36-41. Barnabas suggested to Paul that they go back and visit the churches they had established on the first mission trip. Barnabas wanted to take John Mark with them again, but Paul was set against doing so. The contention was so sharp that they decided to go their separate ways. They no longer had direct fellowship with one another, but they still held to the same basic principles of the Gospel. They would still respect one another and work toward the same goals as Christians. They disagreed on a matter of opinion or judgment about someone. In time, the breach between them was resolved and things were fine again. (2 Tim. 4:11). We should not allow matters of opinion or judgment to break our fellowship with one another. (Rom. 14:1-23; 15:1-7).

AREAS OF FELLOWSHIP

Generally, when we think of fellowship, we think of sharing things in common or joint participation in things. The following seven items help to show the fellowship that Christians enjoy:

1. **Fellowship in Salvation.** We have a common Savior and Redeemer. We obeyed the same gospel that brought the grace of God into our lives. We also reach out to others with this common Salvation. (Jude 3; Matt. 28:18-20)
2. **Fellowship with the "right" people.** We turn from fellowship with the world that we used to enjoy and spend the time and effort to build on the new fellowship with righteous people. (2 Cor. 6:14-18; 1 Cor. 15:33).
3. **Fellowship in adoration and praise to God.** This is a natural outcome of our being redeemed by Jesus. We desire to offer to Him the worship that is correct and desired. (1 Thess. 5:16-22; Rev. 4:8-11; 5:9-10).
4. **Fellowship in Thought.** Our thinking has been changed and renewed toward God. (Rom. 12:1-2). Our thoughts have greatly been affected toward Jesus, the Son of God, who humbled Himself and became a servant to all of us (Phil. 2:5-11). We should strive always to be of "*one mind and one heart.*" (Phil. 2:1-2).

5. **Fellowship in Work.** Our lives are to be filled with good works...for we are working together with, not only one another, but with God as well. (Tit. 3:8; 1 Cor. 3:4-9). We work in harmony with one another, not against one another.
6. **Fellowship in Suffering.** The early church faced much persecution very soon after its beginning. (Acts 8:1-3). The association of the church with one another in Jerusalem had to come to an end because of the great persecution. But it did not affect their desire to continue in fellowship with Christians wherever they had to go. They were even willing to suffer with or die for one another. (1Pet.4:12-19; 2 Cor. 12:15; Phil. 2:29-30).
7. **Fellowship in Joys.** We not only weep with those who are weeping; but, we also rejoice with those who are rejoicing (Rom. 12:15). We share with one another because we are of the same body, we are of the same family, and we love one another. (Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 5:15-16).

When people are of the same mind, they can act in unison, but when they are of a different mind, there is disagreement, distrust, and a lack of working together to a common goal.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

We need to fully understand, appreciate, and experience the fullness of this fellowship in Christ Jesus. There has to be a commonness of beliefs, a closeness that we feel for one another, a willingness to sacrifice for one another, and to put aside our differences for the sake of unity, oneness, and harmony! There is no greater challenge than to be involved in this great fellowship of the people of God! And there are no greater blessings to be found than in this great fellowship. This fellowship requires that we die to self and enthrone Jesus as Lord. His Word is our Law! Our opinions and judgments should not become an issue in our midst.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. Fellowship is something in our hearts, not something we do.
- ___ 2. Fellowship has to be a "joint" action.
- ___ 3. The ideal fellowship is illustrated by the early church.
- ___ 4. True fellowship allows for no disagreements or differences.
- ___ 5. The leadership of the body of Christ depends first and foremost on the leadership and their example.
- ___ 6. The Apostle Paul was wrong in his attitude about John Mark.
- ___ 7. The fundamentals of our fellowship must be based on a common redeemer and savior.
- ___ 8. Our fellowship in Christ not only involves the good, but the bad as well.
- ___ 9. There has to be things held in common in order to have fellowship.
- ___ 10. Dying to self and enthroning Christ in our hearts makes our great fellowship possible.

Lesson Four

"The Issue of Open Fellowship"

The Gospel is man's hope for Eternal Life with God. This message needs to be gotten out to all creation. (Matt. 28:18-20). But there is also the responsibility to continue teaching "*all that Jesus has commanded!*" The reason is obvious—we have a responsibility to live by what Jesus has commanded! But there is also another responsibility—to guard this gospel so that it will not be polluted! (1 Tim. 6:20-21). Therefore, it should be obvious, that we cannot teach one thing and accept anything we desire. The gospel that saves must be believed and obeyed as God gave it (Rom. 1:16; 2 Thess. 1:7-9) and not perverted (Gal. 1:8-9). Believing and following a perverted message will cause us to be lost (Jn. 8:32; 14:6).

OPEN FELLOWSHIP

Some people in the church have begun to advocate "open fellowship" with all religious people. That is, we should accept them without reservations and in spite of the differences in beliefs and practices. Others do insist that they have to obey the Gospel and then we can fellowship them in spite of the differences in their beliefs and practices. This is not a "straw man;" such is actually being advocated by those who claim they are members of the Lord's Church.

What are their reasons or justification for such a view? One group of people makes a distinction between "the gospel" and "doctrine."

1. The "Gospel" is to be preached to the world and if they believe and accept it, they become children of God. All who do this should be in fellowship with one another "in Christ Jesus" because they have a common bond.
2. Then, "Doctrine" is to be taught to those who obey the Gospel in order to know how they should live. The question of fellowship among them is wide open—no restrictions! Fellowship should not be an issue at all because they have their fellowship in Christ when they obeyed the gospel.

This may sound good and desirable, but it has some very basic problems that are being overlooked.

1. They have made an uncalled for distinction between "gospel" and "doctrine" which the Scriptures do not recognize. The Scriptures also teach the very opposite of what they advocate.
2. **Rom. 16:17-18.** Inspiration states that those people who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the "doctrine" which the Christians had been taught; they are to avoid them—in other words, have no fellowship with

them. Notice how inspiration labels them:

- ◇ They do not serve the Lord Jesus.
- ◇ They serve their own belly.
- ◇ They use smooth words and flattering speech to deceive the hearts of the simple.

Some advocate we should walk side by side with such people who teach contrary to the doctrine of Christ; but the inspired Apostle says we are to avoid them. So, fellowship is a real issue among those who profess to be Christians.

Let's take a close look at **Romans 6:17-18**. Inspiration states that these Roman Christians had obeyed from the heart a "form" of the "doctrine" that was delivered unto them. What was that doctrine? It had to be the "gospel" of Christ because upon obedience to it they were made free from being slaves of sin. So, the two terms (gospel and doctrine) seem to be used interchangeable. The word "doctrine" could be translated "teaching." And, it is obvious that a person is also "taught" the "gospel" as well.

IS THE CHURCH A DENOMINATION?

For sure, the early church was not made up of denominations! In fact, "factions" came about in the church because of false teaching that led to groups of people breaking off and starting their own groups. But such people were condemned by Scripture rather than being accepted within the fellowship of Christians. (1 Cor. 1:10-13; 15:12-19; 2 Cor. 11:12-15; Gal. 1:9; Col. 2:4-8; 2 Thess. 2:9-12; 3:6, 14; Tit. 3:10-11; etc.).

Some people in the Lord's Church are advocating that we should be in fellowship with all religious groups—throw the doors wide open to fellowship all. But even these religious groups do not have full or open fellowship with one another. They limit what they do together. These people may say that they fellowship all groups, but they have not given up their peculiar doctrines and practices that sets them off from others.

It should be obvious to all that "true" Christianity in the beginning only recognized "one church." (Eph. 4:4-6). The many churches that exist today are caused by false teachings or erroneous teachings. There is not an acceptance of even the fundamental "onenesses" of Eph. 4:4-6 (one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, or one God). The unity and fellowship together of Christians is definitely based on these basic things being held to in common.

There is one passage in particular that deals with this issue clearly. It is found in 2 Jn. 9-11. Look carefully at what it is pointing out about the fellowship of Christians:

1. If someone comes into your midst and will not abide in the "doctrine of Christ," he does not have God!
2. Such a person is not to be received into your house nor greeted—for the person who receives him shares in his evil deeds.
3. If he abides in the doctrine, he has both the Father and the Son.
4. The person who abides in the doctrine not only has fellowship with one another, but with the Father and the Son.

The book of **Jude** also deals with this issue as well. (**vs. 3-11**). These are people who do not respect the Lordship of Christ and want to walk in the wrong paths and still be accepted among faithful Christians. We are to continue in the Apostles' Doctrine (Acts 2:42) or "sound doctrine." (Tit. 1:9; 2:1). Those who will not do so do not have the fellowship of the Father nor the Son.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

One of the obvious things that make the fellowship of Christians so desirable is the kind of beliefs they hold to and the kind of lives that they live. What makes this fellowship so great is its "**center!**" All faithful Christians recognize Jesus as Lord! He holds us together in a common fellowship. He gives us time to grow and time to mature in Him. Our disagreements will not hurt us if we do not press them to a breach of our fellowship. When we do this, we will all suffer.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. God's message to mankind is not only His offer of eternal life, but also a way of life to be lived.
- ___ 2. It is alright to teach one thing but practice another.
- ___ 3. There is a clear-cut distinction between the term "Gospel" and the term "Doctrine."
- ___ 4. The "Gospel" can only be taught to non-Christians.
- ___ 5. Those who walk contrary to the "doctrine" of Christ can be fellowship correctly.
- ___ 6. Denominational religious groups claim to have fellowship with other religious groups that differ with them.
- ___ 7. True Christians only recognize "one church."
- ___ 8. True biblical fellowship must be based on the seven "one" in Eph. 4:4-6.
- ___ 9. A person who will not abide in the "doctrine of Christ" does not have the Father nor the Son (fellowship with0>
- ___ 10. God gives His people time to grow and mature and continues in fellowship with them.

Lesson Five

"Withdrawing of Fellowship"

Fellowship with God and with our fellow-Christian is a very desirable thing! Because it is desirable and valuable, we should make every effort to maintain such fellowship. But God draws the line on His fellowship with us when we "walk in darkness" rather than "walk in light" (1 Jn. 1:3-7). God also calls upon **us** to draw the line of fellowship with such people. In the Ephesian Letter, inspiration gives a listing of sinful things that we are not to have fellowship with: Fornication; Uncleanness, Covetousness, Filthiness, Foolish talking, Coarse Jestings, and Idolatry. Such people walk in darkness, not light; and such people have no inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and God. We are to have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. (Eph. 5:1-11). In this passage the Apostle is dealing with "gross depravity" or things that are very shameful. (Eph. 5:12). Such things as this should be disgusting and nauseating to the faithful Christian. We might expect the people of the world to engage in such activities, but not the Christian. And when the Christian is caught up in such things, actions need to be taken to try to save his soul from eternal destruction.

WITHDRAWING FROM A FELLOW-CHRISTIAN

Passages like the above are primarily dealing with actions and activities of the world. But sometimes Christians get pulled back into such activities and need help to be salvaged. The passages that we are studying in this Lesson are those that deal with those who profess to believe in Christ and recognize Him as "Lord" but are being pulled back into ungodly living.

1 Cor. 5:1-13. A man in the church was guilty of "sexual immorality" or "fornication." It even specifies what it was—he was living with his father's wife! Such action was not even acceptable among the unbelievers. The Apostle even adds a list of other actions that must be avoided as well: Covetous, Idolater, Reviler, Drunkard, or an Extortioner. They were clearly commanded not to "keep company with" such people. This special "fellowship" or "acceptance" was to be withdrawn if the person did not repent and turn from his ungodly living. We are told to ***put away from yourselves the evil person.***"

1 Thess. 4:11-12; 2 Thess. 3:6-15). Some who became believers in Thessalonica were not very dependable people. It was necessary for the Apostle to admonish them to mind their own business and to work with their own hands so they would have sufficient to live on (4:11-12). He even stated in his first visit that: ***"if anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."*** (2 Thess. 3:10). However, in the 2nd

Letter, it was necessary to face them squarely with their "laziness," being a "busybody," and walking "disorderly." (2 Thess. 3:11). The Apostle commanded the church to "*withdraw from*" such disorderly and unrepentant people and do not keep company with such. However, the person(s) were not to be treated as an enemy, but to admonish him as a brother. It is obvious that this is not sexually immoral person or persons; but rather, "disorderly." That is, he was not walking as a Christian ought to walk. Since the person or persons had not changed their way of living after being admonished—action needed to be taken to awaken him to his predicament.

Rom. 16:17-18. This is another area of sin that needs to be dealt with—causing division and offenses contrary to the Apostles' Doctrine. They were teaching their own "doctrines and commands" and not what the Apostles had given (Matt. 15:8-9). Teaching something different that is not taught by the Lord will definitely cause division and strife. Such people do not care if they divide the body of Christ if they can get the following they want. They will use any kind of means to accomplish their purpose—especially smooth words and flattering speech that deceives people's hearts. Such people do not serve the Lord Jesus, but their own belly.

QUESTIONS TO CHALLENGE

1. How much has our society's outlook affected church discipline?
2. What affect should disciplinary action have on our fellowship?
3. Why does church discipline fail to accomplish its mission?
4. How has the fear of "law suits" affected church discipline?
5. What is the chief reason or reasons why church discipline is not exercised?
6. If church discipline optional?

LOVE AND DISCIPLINE

Christians are aware of God's love for us and how we have benefited from such love. But there are times when love must be involved in disciplining the disobedient or disorderly. (Heb. 12:7-8; Prov. 3:12). Parents, who love their children, will exercise proper discipline for the welfare of their children. (Prov. 22:15; 15:10-12). Failure to do so shows how little they care about their children. It is important to realize that correction is a part of life—it is God's arrangement! Thus, when discipline becomes necessary, it should be done with love and concern, grief and anguish, not vindictive and retaliatory.

People usually desire fellowship with other people because we are social creatures; but they do not like correction. We want the benefits of fellowship.....but often not the responsibilities that must go with the fellowship. Also, when one becomes a Christian, he or she is faced with a change in the things they do and the people with whom they associate. There is a need to see the great need and value of "fellowship with God" first and foremost; and then, to begin establishing a close fellowship with other Christians. If this is not worked at, it is possible that the person will go back to his old activities and fellowships. It is very important that the new Christian develops his love for God, for God's truth, and his love for God's people.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

I guess that most of us would be happy if there was no need to exercise discipline at all—anywhere! But that is not reality! God has redeemed us, offered to bring us into fellowship with Himself and with other Christians. And then, He wants to change more and more into the image of His Son! Part of the process of accomplishing this is the act of and the need of acceptance of discipline. God's commands in regard to such actions are clear and need to be followed. Proper fear of the Lord will be a great encouragement to carry out whatever actions are necessary. ***"My son, do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor detest His correction; for whom the Lord loves He corrects, just as a father the son in whom he delights."***(Prov. 3:11-12).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. Fellowship with God is permanent for the Christian.
- ___ 2. God wants His people to withdraw their fellowship from the people of the world.
- ___ 3. To "*deliver such a one to Satan*" is to call on Satan to take the person's soul.
- ___ 4. You withdraw fellowship from a fellow-Christian by not having any association with him.
- ___ 5. Withdrawal from a fellow-Christian can be for any sin.
- ___ 6. The person to be withdrawn from in 1 Cor. 5 was called an "evil" person.
- ___ 7. Teaching something different is okay if it does not cause division.
- ___ 8. Failure to discipline those who need it can be a sign of a lack of love.
- ___ 9. A person can think that he is in fellowship with God when he really is not.
- ___ 10. God chastens us only through His people.

Lesson Six

"The Restoration of Fellowship"

Fellowship in the New Testament takes on a special connotation. It is **first of all** a fellowship with Deity (the Father and the Son) (1 Jn. 1:3). As long as we "*walk in the light*" we continue to have fellowship with Deity. If we claim to have fellowship with the Father and "*walk in darkness*" we are said to be liars (1 Jn. 1:5-6). Thus, this fellowship is made possible by our walking in the light and being continually cleansed of our sins. In the **second place**, this fellowship is with all of God's people who have been cleansed of their sins and are walking in the light. As redeemed people, we are in the same spiritual family, share in a common faith, a common life, and a common hope. However, it should also be obvious that Christians may have much in common with those who are not God's children and may even share with them in many ways, but they do not share with them the close and special fellowship as taught in the New Testament. The fellowship with God and fellow-Christians is unique and special and should be held to and appreciated as such by all of God's people.

BROKEN FELLOWSHIP

As great and desirable as our fellowship with God and one another is—there comes a time when this fellowship is broken. It should only be broken by SIN! But, maybe we should clarify....SIN that is continued in stubbornly and unrepentant! Some very strong terms are used to describe this breaking up of fellowship:

1 Cor. 5:2—the person is to *"to be taken away from among you."*

1 Cor. 5:5—*"deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh."*

1 Cor. 5:7—*"purge out the old leaven."*

1 Cor. 5:9, 11—*"not to keep company with"*

1 Cor. 5:13—*"put away from yourselves the evil person."*

2 Thess. 3:6—*"withdraw from every brother who walks disorderly and not according to the tradition which he received from us."*

2 Thess. 3:14—*(if he will not repent) "note that person and do not keep company with him."*

2 Thess. 3:15—*"admonish as a brother."*

THE GOAL OF DISCIPLINE

The primary purpose of disciplinary action on the part of the church is a restoring of broken fellowship. Since sin is the culprit that broke the fellowship, it is

necessary that this sin be dealt with properly. Until it is, there can be no restoration of fellowship. The church's action must be exercised in love, kindness, humility, gentleness, with the desire and expectation of the renewal of fellowship. And even if it does not come right away, it should still be worked at to accomplish the desired end.

THINGS NECESSARY FOR RESTORATION

1. A realization on the part of the offender! The sinful person must realize that he or she is lost (cut off from God) and their brethren. Without restoration, there are eternal consequences to be faced!

- a) My prayers are hindered. (1 Pet. 3:7)
- b) My worship is vain. (Matt. 15:7-9)
- c) My pretense at such things is hypocrisy before God.
- d) Such a person is without God and without hope. He thinks more of his sinful condition than he does of God's fellowship. He has chosen to remain in sin rather than to deal properly with it.

2. Repentance is a necessity! (Acts 8:22-23). It must be "true" repentance that brings forth proper fruit (Matt. 3:8). Show by your actions that "true" repentance has taken place (2 Cor. 7:8-10). Leave no room by your words or actions for people to doubt or question your repentance.

3. Forgiveness is a necessity! (2 Cor. 2:6-7; Matt. 6:14-15). It must be "true" forgiveness also. "True" forgiveness brings about a restoring of fellowship. The church must show by their actions that they have forgiven the sinful person. We must leave no room by our words or actions for the person to doubt or question our forgiveness.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

A "true" restoration can only take place when all three of these concepts are involved in our lives. The absence of any one thing will block the restoration of a person to full fellowship again. There must be a full recognition of the sin by the

one who has continued in sin. There must be a willingness to admit the sin and a decision made to turn from such in order to again to walk in the light. Then, the church must show by their love and acceptance of the penitent person that they have forgiven him and desire for them to be back in the fellowship of God and His people.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

True or False

- ___ 1. A person can be in fellowship with God, but not God's people.
- ___ 2. Sharing things in common is necessary in order to have fellowship with others.
- ___ 3. We can have fellowship with people who are not Christians.
- ___ 4. Fellowship with God and God's people should only be broken by sin continued in.
- ___ 5. When we have fellowship with someone that means we endorse all their beliefs.
- ___ 6. The people who bring about discipline are the ones who cause a break in the fellowship.
- ___ 7. No where can the expression "withdrawing of fellowship" be found in the Scriptures.
- ___ 8. Unwillingness to admit one's sin is not necessary to be right with God.
- ___ 9. Full repentance and full forgiveness may take time to accomplish.
- ___ 10. Forgiveness is only offered to those willing to forgive.

