

FELLOWSHIP: HOW DO WE DECIDE?

Text: 2 Cor. 6:14-18

Introduction:

- I. The NT clearly teaches that, as Christians, there is a **fellowship** that we **should** and **should not have**
 - A. We **should have fellowship** with other **Christians** who are striving to be Christlike and live godly and faithful lives
 1. Luke's description of the **church in Jerusalem** bears this out
 - a. Acts 2:42: ⁴² And they **continued steadfastly** in the apostles' doctrine and **fellowship**, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers.
 2. John describes this **kind of fellowship** in his first epistle
 - a. 1 Jn. 1:3: ³ that which we have **seen** and **heard** we **declare** to you, that you also may have **fellowship** with **us**; and truly **our fellowship is** with the **Father** and with **His Son Jesus Christ**.
 - b. 1 Jn. 1:6-7: ⁶ If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him, and **walk in darkness**, we **lie** and **do not practice the truth**. ⁷ But if we **walk in the light** as He is in the light, we have **fellowship** with **one another**, and the **blood** of Jesus Christ His Son **cleanses** us from **all sin**.
 - B. We **should not have fellowship** with sin and error and impenitence
 1. Paul **clearly teaches** that as Christians we are not to have **fellowship** with **sin** and **error**
 - a. Eph. 5:3-7: ³ But **fornication** and all **uncleanness** or **covetousness**, let it not even be **named** among you, as is **fitting** for saints; ⁴ neither **filthiness**, nor **foolish talking**, nor **coarse jesting**, which are not **fitting**, but rather **giving of thanks**. ⁵ For this you know, that no **fornicator**, **unclean person**, nor **covetous man**, who is an **idolater**, has **any inheritance** in the kingdom of Christ and God. ⁶ Let no one **deceive** you with **empty words**, for because of these things the **wrath of God** comes upon the sons of disobedience. ⁷ Therefore **do not be partakers with [symmetochos] them**.
 - b. Eph. 5:8-11: ⁸ For you were once **darkness**, but now you are **light** in the Lord. **Walk as children of light** ⁹ (for the fruit of the Spirit is in all **goodness**, **righteousness**, and **truth**), ¹⁰ finding out what is **acceptable** to the Lord. ¹¹ And have **no fellowship** [*synkoinoneo*] with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather **expose** them.

- c. 1 Tim. 5:22: ²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor **share** [*koinoneo*] **in other people's sins**; keep yourself pure.
 - d. 2 Cor. 6:14-7:1: ¹⁴ **Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers.** For what **fellowship** [*metoche*] has righteousness with lawlessness? And what **communion** [*koinonia*] has light with darkness? ¹⁵ And what **accord** [*synphonesis*] has Christ with Belial? Or what **part** [*meris*] has a believer with an unbeliever? ¹⁶ And what **agreement** [*synkatathesis*] has the temple of God with idols? For you are the temple of the living God. As God has said: “I will **dwell** in them And **walk** among them. I will be their **God**, And they shall be **My people.**” ¹⁷ Therefore “**Come out from among them And be separate**, says the Lord. **Do not touch** what is unclean, And I will **receive** you.” ¹⁸ “I will be a **Father** to you, And you shall be **My sons and daughters**, Says the LORD Almighty.” ¹ Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us **cleanse ourselves** from **all filthiness** of the flesh and spirit, **perfecting holiness** in the **fear of God.**
2. John teaches that as Christians we are not to have **fellowship** with teachers who do not **stay** within the **parameters** of Christ's teaching
- a. 2 Jn. 9-11: ⁹ Whoever **transgresses** and **does not abide** in the **doctrine of Christ** does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring **this doctrine**, do not **receive** him into your house nor **greet** him; ¹¹ for he who **greets** him **shares** in his evil deeds.
 - b. Because of a **textual variant** in the Greek MSS, English versions **differ slightly**:
 - 1) *Parabaino*
 - a) “**Transgresseth**” (KJV)
 - b) “**Transgresses**” (NKJV)
 - c) “**Is transgressing**” (YLT)
 - 2) *Proago*
 - a) “**Goeth onward**” (ASV)
 - b) “**Goes beyond**” (CSB; HCSB; ISV)
 - c) “**Goes on ahead**” (ESV; NET)
 - d) “**Goes too far**” (LEB; NASB)
 - e) “**Runs ahead**” (NIV)
 - c. However, there is little, if any, **difference in meaning** regardless of which term John originally used

- II. Yet every **thoughtful Christian** knows that Christians **do not always agree** about Bible teaching – about what the “**truth**” is
 - A. They didn’t always agree in the **1st century**
 - 1. Differences concerning **Gentile Christians** and the **law of Moses** (Acts 15)
 - 2. Differences concerning **eating meat** and **observing days** (Rom. 14)
 - 3. Differences concerning the **resurrection of the dead** (1 Cor. 15)
 - 4. Etc.
 - B. Christians don’t always agree **today** in the **21st century**
- III. Sometimes Christians in the first century **maintained fellowship** despite their **differences** and sometimes **they did not**
 - A. They **maintained fellowship** despite differences over **eating meat** and **observing days** (Rom. 14; 1 Cor. 8-10)
 - B. They **did not maintain fellowship** with Judaizing teachers who tried to **bind the law of Moses on Gentile converts** (Gal. 2:1-5)
- IV. In modern times, Christians have **maintained fellowship** despite their **differences** on some things, and they have **severed fellowship** because of their **differences** on other things
 - A. Christians have **maintained fellowship** despite their differences concerning:
 - 1. A woman wearing a **head covering**
 - 2. A Christian going to **war**
 - 3. Sunday night **communion**
 - 4. Etc.
 - B. Christians have **severed fellowship** because of their differences concerning:
 - 1. **Premillennialism**
 - 2. **Institutionalism**
 - 3. **MDR**
 - 4. Etc.
- V. So I want to help all of us think about a very **important question** concerning the complicated subject of **fellowship**

- A. Question: “If our unity is based on **truth**, and yet there are things we all **do not agree** on, how do we decide which things are **important to base our fellowship upon**, and which things we **continue to study** as we worship and work together?”
 - B. Question: “If we **don't all agree** on everything, how do we decide when we can **work together** as a team and when we **can't**? ”
- VI. Now before I say more about that, I want to remind you that when we talk about “**fellowship**,” we’re basically talking about “**joint participation** or **sharing** in **spiritual things**”

A. “**Fellowship**” (*koinonia*)

1. *BAGD*: “1. *association, communion, fellowship, close relationship* (hence a favorite expr. for the marital relationship as the most intimate betw. human beings...) *tinos* with or *to someone*.... -- Abs. *fellowship*, (brotherly) *unity*.... -- *k.* also has the concrete mng. *society, brotherhood* as a closely knit majority, naturally belonging together.... 2. *generosity, fellow-feeling, altruism*.... 3. abstr. for concr. *sign of fellowship, proof of brotherly unity, even gift, contribution*.... 4. *participation, sharing tinos in someth....*” (438-439)
2. *Thayer*: “*fellowship, association, community, communion, joint participation, intercourse*; in the N.T. as in class. Grk. 1. *the share which one has in anything, participation*.... 2. *intercourse, fellowship, intimacy*.... By a use unknown to prof. auth. ***koinonia*** in the N.T. denotes 3. *a benefaction jointly contributed, a collection, a contribution*, as exhibiting an embodiment and proof of fellowship....” (#2842, 352)
3. *Vine*: “(a) *communion, fellowship, sharing in common* (from *koinos*, common).... (b) *that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution*....” (420)

B. Biblical fellowship is not just “**joint participation**” or “**sharing**,” it is sharing in **spiritual things** (that’s the way Bible writers use the term)

1. The **apostles’ fellowship** (Acts 2:42)
2. Benevolent relief for **poor saints** (Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 9:13)
3. The fellowship of **Christ** (1 Cor. 1:9)
4. The communion of the **blood** and **body** of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16-17)
5. No communion between **light** and **darkness** (2 Cor. 6:14)
6. The fellowship of ministering to **needy saints** (2 Cor. 8:4)
7. The communion/fellowship of the **Holy Spirit** (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1)
8. The right hands of fellowship in **preaching the gospel** (Gal. 2:9)
9. The fellowship of **the mystery** (Eph. 3:9-12)

10. Fellowship in supporting a **preacher** (Phil. 1:3-5; 4:15-18)
11. The fellowship of **Christ's sufferings** (Phil. 3:10)
12. The sharing of one's **faith** (Phile. 6)
13. To **share** (Heb. 13:16)
14. Fellowship with the **apostles**, the **Father**, and the **Son** (1 Jn. 1:3)
15. Fellowship with **God** (1 Jn. 1:6-7)

C. Christians **share in** a:

1. Common **salvation** (Jude 3)
2. Common **faith** (Tit. 1:4)
3. Common **nature** (2 Pet. 1:4)
4. Common **blessings** (Eph. 1:3-12)
5. Common **responsibilities** (Phil. 1:5)

D. Christians are “**fellow**s” in a **spiritual relationship** and in **spiritual worship** and **work**

1. **Disciples** (Jn. 11:16)
2. **Workers** (Rom. 16:3, 9, 21; 1 Cor. 3:9; 2 Cor. 1:24; 8:23; Phil. 4:3; Col. 4:11; 3 Jn. 8)
3. **Citizens** (Eph. 2:19)
4. **Heirs** (Eph. 3:6)
5. **Soldiers** (Phil. 2:25; Phile. 2)
6. **Servants** (Col. 1:7; 4:7; Rev. 6:11)
7. **Laborers** (1 Th. 3:2; Phile. 1, 24)

E. Although many today use the term “**fellowship**” to describe “**social association**,” that is not the way **Bible writers** use the term

1. *Major Premise*: I can “**keep company with**” an alien sinner (1 Cor. 5:9-10)
2. *Minor Premise*: I cannot have “**fellowship**” with an alien sinner (2 Cor. 6:14-18; Eph. 5:11)
3. *Conclusion*: Therefore, “**keeping company with**” is not the same thing as having “**fellowship**”

VII. I also want to remind you that the subject of fellowship is a **broad subject** that can involve **many things**:

A. Entering into fellowship with a local church

1. Acts 9:26-29: ²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he **tried to join the disciples**; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹ And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.

B. Breaking or withdrawing fellowship from a church member

1. 1 Cor. 5:1-5: ¹ It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles—that a man has his father’s wife! ² And you are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he who has done this deed might be taken away from among you. ³ For I indeed, as absent in body but present in spirit, have already judged (as though I were present) him who has so done this deed. ⁴ In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when you are gathered together, along with my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, ⁵ **deliver such a one to Satan** for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

C. Financially supporting a gospel preacher in another place

1. Php. 1:3-5: ³ I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, ⁴ always in every prayer of mine making request for you all with joy, ⁵ for your **fellowship** in the gospel from the first day until now,
2. Php. 4:15-17: ¹⁵ Now you Philippians know also that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church **shared** with me concerning giving and receiving but you only. ¹⁶ For even in Thessalonica you sent aid once and again for my necessities. ¹⁷ Not that I seek the gift, but I seek the fruit that abounds to your account.
 - a. Paul uses the verb form (*koinoneo*) of the noun that is often translated “**fellowship**” (*koinonia*)
 - b. ASV: “no church had **fellowship** with me”
 - c. ESV: “no church entered into **partnership** with me” (cf. RSV)
 - d. ISV: “no church **participated** with me”
 - e. NASB: “no church **shared** with me” (cf. HCSB; LEB; NET; NIV; NRSV)

D. Sharing in a particular activity with another Christian

1. Partaking of the **Lord's Supper** together (1 Cor. 10:14-22)

E. Helping needy saints

1. Rom. 12:13: ¹³ **distributing** to the needs of the saints, given to hospitality.
2. Rom. 15:26: ²⁶ For it pleased those from Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain **contribution** for the poor among the saints who are in Jerusalem.

F. Receiving spiritual instruction

1. Rom. 15:27: ²⁷ It pleased them indeed, and they are their debtors. For if the Gentiles have been **partakers** of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister to them in material things.

G. Sharing in good things with a teacher

1. Gal. 6:6: ⁶ Let him who is taught the word **share** in all good things with him who teaches.

H. Sharing in someone's sin

1. 1 Tim. 5:22: ²² Do not lay hands on anyone hastily, nor **share** in other people's sins; keep yourself pure.

I. Encouraging a false teacher

1. 2 Jn. 9-11: ⁹ Whoever transgresses and does not abide in the doctrine of Christ does not have God. He who abides in the doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; ¹¹ for he who greets him **shares** in his evil deeds.
- J. So when we talk about "**fellowship**," we're talking about a whole lot more than just what we commonly call "**church discipline**"

VIII.Let's start by acknowledging that **unity** is to be based on **truth**

- A. Jn. 17:17: ¹⁷ **Sanctify** them by Your **truth**. Your **word** is **truth**.
- B. Jn. 17:20-23: ²⁰ "I do not pray for these alone, but also for those who will believe in Me through their word; ²¹ that they all may be **one**, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be **one in Us**, that the world may believe that You sent Me. ²² And the glory which You gave Me I have given them, that they may be **one just as We are one**: ²³ I in them, and You in Me; that they may be **made perfect in one**, and that the world may know that You have sent Me, and have loved them as You have loved Me.

- C. 1 Jn. 1:6-7: ⁶ If we say that we have **fellowship** with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice **the truth**. ⁷ But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.
 - D. **Who's right** must be determined by **what's right**; so before we talk about **fellowship**, we need to talk about **truth**
- IX. As you think about the fact that historically **some differences** between Christians have led to a **“parting of the ways”** and others have not, let me warn you that **what “we” have done in the past** may or may not be **what we should have done**
- A. Mistakes can be made in **extending, maintaining, and withdrawing** fellowship
 - B. Mistakes were made in **first-century churches**:
 - 1. The church in **Jerusalem refused to accept** Saul of Tarsus into their fellowship at first (Acts 9:26-29)
 - a. Their **initial hesitancy was appropriate** based upon the **knowledge** they had at the time, but nonetheless Saul of Tarsus was a **true Christian** and therefore **worthy of fellowship**
 - 2. The church in **Corinth maintained fellowship** with an immoral brother when they shouldn't have (1 Cor. 5:1ff)
 - 3. **Diotropes severed fellowship** with some when he shouldn't have (3 Jn. 9-10)
 - C. Likewise, **mistakes** can be made today
 - 1. Just as some may have **broken fellowship** when they should have **maintained it**, others may have **maintained fellowship** when they should have **broken it**
 - D. Therefore we shouldn't assume that **everything** we've done in the **past** was **always right** then try to make **future decisions** to fit **past actions**
- X. Now let me try to state what I believe is **the core of the question** we are grappling with:
- A. **Question:** “How do we decide when **we must break fellowship** because of disagreements and when **we can continue fellowship** in spite of disagreements?”

Body:

- I. **Preliminary Observations:**
- A. As we ponder that question, it's easy to give **vague, nonspecific answers** that really aren't very helpful
 - 1. Someone might say: **“Break fellowship when fellowship with God is broken”**
 - a. But after we give that kind of answer, we still have to decide **the point when fellowship with God is broken**

- B. In the _____ years that I've been preaching, I've become more and more convinced that this matter of fellowship is **not an easy question to answer**
1. One reason I believe it's difficult to answer is because there is **no single specific answer** that **solves every problem** or situation
 - a. I wish I could offer **a single Bible truth** that we all could unerringly apply in **every possible situation**
 - b. But I am convinced that there are **a number of different factors** that we must consider in making various decisions about fellowship
- C. It's a mistake to make decisions about fellowship on the basis of a single pertinent factor, or maybe several pertinent factors, but not all the pertinent factors
1. I believe this is a **mistake** that Christians **sometimes make**
- D. I realize that **applying** these principles will involve some measure of **subjectivity**
1. But that doesn't mean we should "**throw the baby out with the bathwater**"
 2. If we were to decide that we should not **make any decision** or **do anything** because **subjectivity** is involved, we'd never be able to **make any decision** or **get anything done**
- E. This lesson will not **solve all the problems** or **answer all the questions**
1. I don't have **all the answers**
 2. I doubt that I even know **all the questions**
- F. But I believe this lesson will help to **shed some light** on a very **difficult issue** that local churches have to **wrestle with** from time to time
1. So let me talk about **some of the questions** that I believe we should **consider** when we have to decide whether we should:
 - a. **Continue fellowship** in spite of disagreements
 - b. **Break fellowship** because of disagreements

II. Pertinent Questions

- A. **“Who** is involved?”
1. Do I differ with a **preacher**, an **elder**, a **mature Christian**, a **new convert**?
 2. Should a **preacher** or an **elder** be held to a **higher standard** than the **average Christian** in the pew or a **new convert**?

- a. James indicates that the Lord holds **teachers** to a **higher standard**
 - 1) Jas. 3:1: ¹ My brethren, let not many of you become **teachers**, knowing that we shall receive a **stricter judgment**.
 - b. If the Lord holds **teachers** to a **higher standard, should we?**
 - c. Fact: We do **expect more** out of some Christians than others
 - 1) A **mature Christian** vs. a **babe** in Christ
 - 2) An **elder** vs. an average **church member**
 - 3) An **older preacher** vs. a **younger preacher**
 - 3. Now, I'm not suggesting that we can be **impatient** or **intolerant** if we differ with a **preacher** or an **elder**. Preachers deserve **patience** and **tolerance**, too
 - 4. But I'm suggesting that a **new convert** or the **average Christian** in the pew probably deserves **more patience** and **more tolerance** than a preacher or an elder
 - 5. So I believe that **spiritual maturity** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship
- B. “**How clear** is the truth at issue?”
- 1. Now when I suggest that, I’m not saying that **the only truth that matters is what is expressly stated** in the word of God
 - a. I firmly believe that the Bible teaches by **necessary implications** and **approved examples** as well as **express statements** and **direct commands**
 - 2. What I am saying is that **some teaching in the Bible is very clear** and **some is more difficult** to comprehend
 - a. And if someone wants to dispute that, he’ll have to **argue with the apostle Peter**
 - 1) 2 Pet. 3:15-16: ¹⁵ and consider that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation —as also our beloved brother Paul, according to the wisdom given to him, has written to you, ¹⁶ as also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things, in which are **some things hard to understand**, which **untaught and unstable people twist** to their own **destruction**, as they do also the rest of the Scriptures.
 - b. Now please note that Peter said:
 - 1) **Some** things, not **all** things
 - 2) **Hard**, not **impossible**
 - 3) **Untaught and unstable** people, not **knowledgeable and stable** people

4) Twisting the Scriptures results in destruction

- a) We don't get a "buy" just because some things are **hard** to understand
 - b) We're not **excused** simply because we may be "**untaught**" and "**unstable**"
 - c. However I do believe there is **truth** in the **old adage** that says: "The **plain things** are the **main things** and the **main things** are the **plain things**!"
3. Now let me **illustrate** what I'm talking about:
- a. Most would grant that what the Hebrew writer says about **the ancestry of Melchizedek** (Heb. 7:3) is not as clear and unmistakable as what the Bible says about **the lineage of Jesus**
 - 1) Therefore we might view someone who differs with us about **Melchizedek** differently than we would view someone who differs with us about **the lineage of Jesus**
 - b. Most would grant that what Paul says about "**baptism for the dead**" (1 Cor. 15:29) is not as clear and unmistakable as what he says about **Jesus' resurrection from the dead**
 - 1) Therefore we might view someone who differs with us about "**baptism for the dead**" differently than we would view someone who differs with us about **Jesus' resurrection from the dead**
 - c. Biblical teaching on **the covering and going to war** is certainly not as clear, at least to me, as biblical teaching on **baptism for the remission of sins**
4. So I believe that the **clarity of biblical teaching** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship

C. "How certain are we of our own understanding of truth?"

1. At first the church in Jerusalem was **not certain** that they should accept Saul of Tarsus into their fellowship, and so **they didn't** until **they became certain**
 - a. Acts 9:26-29: ²⁶ And when Saul had come to Jerusalem, he **tried to join the disciples**; but they were all afraid of him, and did not believe that he was a disciple. ²⁷ But Barnabas took him and brought him to the apostles. And he declared to them how he had seen the Lord on the road, and that He had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus. ²⁸ So he was with them at Jerusalem, coming in and going out. ²⁹ And he spoke boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus and disputed against the Hellenists, but they attempted to kill him.
2. We've all heard the old adage that says, "**He who hesitates is lost**," but someone else has well said, "**He who hesitates is sometimes saved!**"

3. Let me **illustrate** what I'm talking about:
 - a. Some women who wear an **artificial covering** may not be sure **it's required**, but they're not sure **it isn't**
 - 1) They are "**certain enough**" to **wear it** themselves, but **not "certain enough"** to **bind it** on others
 - 2) They are not as "**certain**" about the **artificial covering** as they are about **baptism for the remission of sins**
4. Now this factor could certainly be **misused** and **abused**
 - a. If someone were to decide that he would just be "**uncertain**" about **everything** so he wouldn't have to **wrestle with the difficult question of fellowship**, that would be a **serious mistake**
 - 1) Christ commands us to **understand His will**
 - a) Eph. 5:17: ¹⁷ Therefore do not be unwise, but **understand** what the will of the Lord is.
 - b) If Christ **commands** us to **understand** His will, then we can **understand** it
 - c) **Understanding Christ's will**, will necessarily involve **understanding what isn't His will**
 - 2) G. K. Chesterton: "The object of opening the mind, as of opening the mouth, is to **shut it again on something solid.**" (*Autobiography. Collected Works* Vol. 16, p. 212)
 - 3) We shouldn't be so "**open-minded**" that **our brains fall out!**
 - b. If someone were to decide: "Since I'm not sure about **everything**, I can't be sure about **anything**," that would be a **serious mistake**
 - 1) Just because we **don't have all the answers** that doesn't mean we **can't have any of the answers**
 - 2) If we adopt this approach, in fleeing **Babylon**, we will run past **Jerusalem**, and wind up in **Rome**
 - 3) There are things we can **be sure** about
 - a) 2 Tim. 3:14-17: ¹⁴ But you must **continue** in the things which you have **learned** and **been assured of**, knowing from whom you have learned them, ¹⁵ and that from childhood you have **known** the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. ¹⁶ All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, ¹⁷ that the man of God may be complete, thoroughly equipped for every good work.

- c. If someone were to think: “I’m **certain** I’m right; therefore I **must** be right,” that would also be a serious mistake
 - 1) **Saul of Tarsus** was “**certain**” that he should **persecute Christians** (Acts 26:9-11), but his certainty didn’t make him right
 - 2) Pr. 14:12: ¹² There is a way that **seems right** to a man, But its **end** is the **way of death**. (cf. Pr. 16:25)
 - 3) 1 Cor. 4:3-5: ³ But with me it is a **very small thing** that I should be **judged** by **you** or by a **human court**. In fact, I do not even **judge myself**. ⁴ For I **know of nothing against myself**, yet I am **not justified** by this; but He who **judges me** is the **Lord**. ⁵ Therefore **judge nothing before the time**, until the **Lord comes**, who will both bring to **light** the **hidden things** of darkness and **reveal the counsels of the hearts**. Then each one’s **praise** will come from **God**.
- 5. So I believe that **my own certainty** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship
- D. “Has this Christian with whom I differ had **sufficient time and opportunity** to learn the truth?”
 - 1. It is an indisputable fact that **understanding** doesn’t always come **immediately**. **Some time** is required to **learn some things**; and this is something that **God understands**
 - a. Heb. 5:12: ¹² For though **by this time you ought to be teachers**, you need someone to teach you again the first principles of the oracles of God; and you have come to need **milk** and not **solid food**.
 - 2. God doesn’t expect people **to know** what they **haven’t had time to learn**
 - a. 2 Cor. 8:12: ¹² For if there is first a **willing mind**, it is accepted according to **what one has**, and not according to **what he does not have**.
 - b. While this statement was made in a **completely different context** about a **completely different subject** (i.e. the benevolent contribution for needy saints in Jerusalem), I believe it states a **general principle** that applies in other areas: **God does not expect us to do what we cannot do**
 - 3. The apostle **Paul** did not always **respond to error in the same way**
 - a. There were **some Christians** in the church at Corinth who **denied the resurrection of the dead**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 15:12: ¹² Now if Christ is preached that He has been raised from the dead, how do **some** among you **say** that there is **no resurrection of the dead**?
 - a) Note: They didn’t just **believe** this; they **taught** it

- 2) Yet Paul still maintained fellowship with these Christians, despite this serious error and many others
- a) He addressed them as “**the church of God**” 1 Cor. 1:2
 - 1] If a **church today**, had **all of the problems** that the Corinthian church had then, would you call it **a church of God**?
 - b) He wrote to them as those who were “**sanctified**” in Christ Jesus and called “**saints**” 1 Cor. 1:2
 - 1] Would you be **comfortable** referring to folks with all those problems as “**saints**”?
 - c) He used the **same greeting** for this **trouble-ridden church** that he used for most of the others 1 Cor. 1:3
 - 1] Would you **use the same kind of greeting** for a church like Corinth today?
 - d) He expressed his **thanksgiving** for the **brethren** at Corinth and for the **grace** that God had shown them 1 Cor. 1:4-8
 - 1] Would you be **thankful for brethren** who had **all the problems** that the Corinthians had?
 - e) When Paul said of the gospel “...but to US who are being saved it is the power of God,” (1 Cor. 1:18) didn’t he include the Corinthians?
 - 1] Would you **include Christians** with **all the problems** that the Corinthians had as being a part of **those “who are being saved”**?
 - f) He described the church at Corinth as the “**temple of God**”? 1 Cor. 3:16-17
 - 1] Would you **describe a church today** with those kind of problems as a “**temple of God**”?
 - g) He addresses the Corinthians as “**brethren**” 22 times in this letter, twice he calls them “**my brethren,**” once he calls them “**my beloved brethren**” (1 Cor. 15:58) and another time he says “**my beloved children**” (1 Cor. 4:14)
 - 1] Would you describe folks like that as your “**brethren,**” much less “**beloved brethren**”?
 - 2] I fear that some of my **preaching colleagues** today would **choke** on those words. Perhaps I would too
 - h) He spoke of their **labor** as **not being vain** in the Lord 1 Cor. 15:58

- i) He sent them **hearty greetings** from his companions 1 Cor. 16:19-20
- j) He ended his letter with obvious **words of affection** 1 Cor. 16:23-24
 - 1] As a preacher, would I want to **work** with a church like Corinth today? Would I want to **have anything to do** with a church like that? Would I have **words of affection** for a church like Corinth
- 3) Now it would be a serious mistake to infer that the Corinthians would have **remained in fellowship indefinitely** with Paul (and God [?]) if they had **continued** in their **misperception** and **other errors**
- 4) But they evidently were in **fellowship** with Paul (and God [?]) when he wrote **1 Corinthians**
 - a) Would these statements by the apostle Paul about the Corinthians indicate that Christians are not **in and out of grace** whenever something is not **100% correct** in their lives???
 - b) The NT clearly teaches that Christians are **cleansed** of their sins by Christ's blood if:
 - 1] They **walk** in the light (1 Jn. 1:7)
 - 2] They **confess** their sins (1 Jn. 1:9)
 - 3] They **repent** of their sins (Acts 8:18-24)
 - a] True repentance leads to the **cessation** of sins (Ezek. 18:30-32; Rev. 9:20-21)
 - b. On the other hand, **Hymenaeus and Philetus** taught that the **resurrection was already past**, and Paul **did not tolerate** that
 - 1) 2 Tim. 2:16-18: ¹⁶ But **shun profane and idle babblings**, for they will increase to more ungodliness. ¹⁷ And their message will spread like cancer. **Hymenaeus and Philetus are of this sort**, ¹⁸ who have strayed concerning the truth, saying that **the resurrection is already past**; and they **overthrew the faith of some**.
 - 4. Why the **difference**? Well, there may be **several factors** involved
 - a. Perhaps Hymenaeus and Philetus were **preachers** and Paul held them to a **higher standard** than some of the saints in Corinth
 - b. Perhaps the saints in Corinth who denied the resurrection of the dead had not had **sufficient time and opportunity to learn the truth** but Hymenaeus and Philetus had...

- 1) Paul wrote **1 Corinthians** ca. **AD 55/56**
 - 2) Paul wrote **2 Timothy** ca. **AD 65-67**
 5. So I believe that **time and opportunity to learn** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship
 - a. If a fellow accepts an erroneous view after studying it for only **2 months**, that's one thing
 - b. If a fellow believes an erroneous view, and he's been studying it for **20 years**, that's something else
 6. Furthermore, while someone may have had **time and opportunity to study and learn**, that does not necessarily mean he **has studied and learned**
 - a. Just because someone has been a **Christian for several years** does not necessarily mean that he has **seriously studied** a particular issue
 - 1) Illust.: My ignorance about the "**head-covering**" until I got to Florida College
- E. "What is the other person's **attitude toward the truth**?"
1. A **proper attitude** toward the truth is vitally important
 - a. Jn. 7:17: ¹⁷ If anyone **wills to do His will**, he shall **know** concerning the doctrine, whether it is from God or whether I speak on My own authority.
 2. If a person doesn't **love the truth** and **want the truth**, God will make it easy for him to **believe a lie**
 - a. 2 Th. 2:9-12: ⁹ The coming of the lawless one is according to the working of Satan, with all power, signs, and lying wonders, ¹⁰ and with all unrighteous deception among those who perish, because **they did not receive the love of the truth, that they might be saved.** ¹¹ And for this reason **God will send them strong delusion, that they should believe the lie,** ¹² that they all may be condemned who did not believe the truth but had pleasure in unrighteousness.
 3. Basically, I'm saying that we need to **try to determine**, as best we can, if this person with whom we differ is "**honest**" in his approach to the Scriptures
 4. While some might think it's **impossible to assess** someone else's **honesty**, Jesus **commands** us to **do that very thing**
 - a. Mt. 7:6: ⁶ "Do not **give what is holy to the dogs**; nor **cast your pearls before swine**, lest they trample them under their feet, and turn and tear you in pieces."
 5. So how can we **assess** someone else's **honesty**?

- a. Does he have the “**Berean spirit**”?
 - 1) Acts 17:10-11: ¹⁰ Then the brethren immediately sent Paul and Silas away by night to Berea. When they arrived, they went into the synagogue of the Jews. ¹¹ These were more **fair-minded** than those in Thessalonica, in that they **received** the word with **all readiness**, and **searched** the **Scriptures daily** to find out whether these things were so.
 - 2) Will this person **listen**? With **all readiness**? Will he **search** the Scriptures? Will he do that **diligently**?
- b. Is he willing to **test all things**?
 - 1) 1 Th. 5:21: ²¹ Test all things; **hold fast** what is good.
 - c. Does he accept his view on the basis of **weighty or flimsy evidence**?
 - 1) Question: Should I have confidence in a man who believes in a **flat earth**?
 - 2) Question: Should I have confidence in a preacher who holds a **bizarre view** on the basis of **flimsy evidence**?
 - d. If a man **ignores**, much less **refutes, objections** to his view(s), is he really **being honest** in his approach to the Scriptures?
 - 1) Question: Are **evolutionists** being honest when they ignore evidence that contradicts the theory of **evolution**?
 - 2) Question: Are **climatologists** being honest when they ignore evidence that contradicts the theory of **global warming**?
 - 3) See “Excerpt From *The Indwelling Of Deity*”
 - 4) See “What Is Written?” article (09/27/09)
 - 6. If someone will not do these things, I’m going to **question his honesty** (and I think rightfully so)
 - 7. So I believe that **a person’s honesty** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship
 - 8. Note: When I say that **a person’s honesty** is a factor to consider, I’m not saying that someone’s **honesty** and **sincerity** are **all that matters** in any issue
 - a. **Some errors** may require a **breaking of fellowship** no matter **how honest and sincere** we perceive the person in error to be (I’ll say more about this later)
 - F. “Is this an erroneous view that is **believed privately** but **not taught publicly**?”
 - 1. Some Christians seem to have the idea that if an **erroneous view** is **believed privately** but **not taught publicly** that should **never affect fellowship**

- a. Question: “If error is **believed but not taught**, what’s the **big deal**? Why would fellowship ever have to be broken?”
 - b. That’s an **excellent question!**
 - c. My answer: “Sometimes fellowship would **not have to be broken**, and sometimes it **would**.” It all depends on the **person** involved, the **issue** at stake, and the **consequences** of this privately held view
2. Some **erroneous views** that are **believed privately but not taught publicly** do not have **any serious consequences**, and fellowship would not need to be broken
 - a. Illust.: If someone **observes** the Lord’s Supper **every Sunday** but he believes that it could be **observed less frequently** (or on **another day**), but he keeps that to himself
 3. Some **erroneous views** that are **believed privately but not taught publicly** do have **serious consequences**, and fellowship may need to be broken
 - a. Illust.: If a preacher comes to the conclusion that **baptism is not essential to salvation**, but he keeps that to himself
 - 1) To hold this belief privately, he must not teach on the **purpose of baptism**, and that has **serious consequences**
 - b. Illust.: If a preacher accepts **Realized Eschatology**, but keeps that to himself
 - 1) To hold this **belief privately**, he **cannot preach** on:
 - a) **Key Fundamental Doctrines**:
 - 1] The **Second Coming**
 - 2] The **resurrection of the body**
 - 3] The **Final Judgment**
 - 4] Etc.
 - b) **Key Bible Passages**:
 - 1] Mt. 25:31-46
 - 2] Acts 1:11
 - 3] Acts 17:30-31
 - 4] 1 Cor. 15
 - 5] 1 Th. 4:13-5:11
 - 6] 2 Pet. 3

- 2) These are **serious consequences**
- 3) To keep his belief **private**, he must:
 - a) Ignore certain passages, but that is not preaching the “**whole counsel of God**” (Acts 20:27)
 - b) “**Observe the Passover**” with respect to the “controversial elements” in these Bible passages
 - c) He must **preach something different publicly** than he believes privately, and that’s **dishonest**
 - d) He must **preach publicly** what he **believes privately**, but then his belief is **not private** anymore
4. **Elders** are to **protect** the local church from **error** and **false teaching**
 - a. Acts 20:28-31: ²⁸ Therefore **take heed** to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to **shepherd** the church of God which He purchased with His own blood. ²⁹ For I know this, that after my departure savage wolves will come in among you, not sparing the flock. ³⁰ Also from among yourselves men will rise up, speaking perverse things, to draw away the disciples after themselves. ³¹ Therefore watch, and remember that for three years I did not cease to warn everyone night and day with tears.
 - b. Tit. 1:9 [NASB]: ⁹ **holding fast** the faithful word which is in accordance with the teaching, so that he will be able both to **exhort** in sound doctrine and to **refute** those who contradict.
 - c. If an **elder** holds a **doctrinal view privately** that effectively **prevents him from doing this**, should that be considered a **significant factor** that would affect **fellowship**?
5. **Preachers** have the obligation to preach the “**whole counsel of God**”
 - a. Jer. 26:2: ² “Thus says the LORD: ‘Stand in the court of the LORD’s house, and speak to all the cities of Judah, which come to worship in the LORD’s house, **all the words** that I command you to speak to them. **Do not diminish a word.**’
 - b. Ezek. 3:10-11: ¹⁰ Moreover He said to me: “Son of man, receive into your heart **all My words** that I speak to you, and hear with your ears. ¹¹ And go, get to the captives, to the children of your people, and speak to them and tell them, ‘Thus says the Lord GOD,’ whether they hear, or whether they refuse.”
 - c. Acts 20:18-21: ¹⁸ And when they had come to him, he said to them: “You know, from the first day that I came to Asia, in what manner I always lived among you, ¹⁹ serving the Lord with all humility, with many tears and trials which happened to me by the plotting of the Jews; ²⁰ how I **kept back nothing that was helpful**, but proclaimed it to you, and taught you **publicly** and from **house to house**, ²¹ testifying to Jews, and also to Greeks, repentance toward God and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

- d. Acts 20:26-27: ²⁶ Therefore I testify to you this day that I am innocent of the blood of all men. ²⁷ For I have not shunned to declare to you **the whole counsel of God.**
 - e. If a **preacher** holds a **doctrinal view privately** that effectively **keeps him from preaching the whole counsel of God**, should that be considered a **significant factor** that would affect **fellowship**?
 - f. Should a local church **support a preacher** for whom **some subjects are taboo**?
 - 6. So if an **erroneous view** is **believed but not taught**, that may or may not affect fellowship depending upon **other factors**
- G. “Would extending or continuing fellowship require me as an individual to **practice what I believe to be wrong**?”
1. The Bible clearly teaches that I cannot under any circumstance **please God** and at the same time **do what I believe is wrong**
 - a. Rom. 14:5: ⁵ One person esteems *one* day above another; another esteems every day *alike*. **Let each be fully convinced in his own mind.**
 - 1) Paul does not mean be fully convinced that something is **wrong** before you **stop** doing it
 - 2) He means be fully convinced that something is **right** before you **start** doing it
 - b. Rom. 14:22-23: ²² Do you have faith? Have it to yourself before God. Happy is he who does not condemn himself in what he approves. ²³ But **he who doubts is condemned if he eats**, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin.
 - c. *Jim McGuiggan*: “How can a man commit a sin just because he can’t rid himself of erroneous views? Listen, **he chooses to do what he believes is wrong!** **The sin is not in the act itself, it is in choosing to act sinfully.** Two courses are open to the man, A & B. He believes A to be sinful and B to be innocent. He chooses A. It is a sinful choice, **he should not choose what he judges is sinful.** He believes God is displeased with A and yet he chooses. In this he shows inner disloyalty. If the act had been sinful in itself he still would have chosen it. This is disloyalty in relation to God.” (Bold emphasis added, 125)
 2. Based upon this biblical principle, there are several things that **progressive churches** do that **mainline churches** (i.e. “institutional churches”) cannot do, support, or ignore:
 - a. You cannot support Christians who do not believe in the **inerrancy of Scripture**
 - b. You cannot support Christians who have **expanded the role of women** beyond NT teaching
 - c. You cannot support Christians who use **instrumental music** in public worship

- d. You cannot support Christians who engage in what I will call “**worshiptainment**”
 - e. You cannot support Christians who have become caught up in “**emotionalism**” and “**neo-Pentecostalism**”
 - f. You cannot support Christians who reject the essentiality of **baptism for the remission of sins**
 - g. You cannot support Christians who try to justify some of their practices as merely **aids** when they are clearly **additions** to God’s word
3. Christians in “non-institutional” churches are **also opposed** to these things, and we cannot **in any way support** these things either
4. However, based upon this same biblical principle, there are several things that **mainline churches** (i.e. “institutional churches”) do that “**non-institutional churches**” cannot **do, support, or ignore**:
- a. We cannot support a church that uses the Lord’s money to support **human institutions** (e.g. orphan’s homes, homes for unwed mothers, colleges, etc.)
 - b. We cannot support a church that uses the Lord’s money to help **needy non-Christians**
 - c. We cannot support a church that uses the Lord’s money to support a **sponsoring church**
 - d. We cannot support a church that plans and provides for “**fellowship meals**” in a “**fellowship hall**”
 - e. We cannot support a church that uses the Lord’s money to **sponsor social and recreational activities**
5. Note: Christians in “**non-institutional churches**” view Christians in “**institutional churches**” the same way Christians in “**institutional churches**” view Christians in “**progressive churches**”
- a. Question: Why is your view of the “progressives” **correct**, and our view of “institutionalists” **incorrect**?
 - b. Just as you (i.e. “institutionalists”) **cannot change your minds** about them (i.e. “progressives”), we (i.e. “non-institutionalists”) **cannot change our minds** about you (i.e. “institutionalists”) just because:
 - 1) You believe you are **right** and we are **wrong**
 - 2) You may believe that we are a bit “**fanatical**”
 - 3) You want us to have **some kind of “fellowship”** with you, and you believe we should

- c. Just as you (i.e. “institutionalists”) are unwilling to change your mind about them (i.e. “progressives”) without **biblical argumentation** and **well-reasoned persuasion**, so we are unwilling to change our minds about you (i.e. “institutionalists”) without the same things, and rightfully so
 - d. Just as they (i.e. “progressives”) want you (i.e. “institutionalists”) to **accommodate them**, but **you don’t believe you can**, so you (i.e. “institutionalists”) want us (i.e. “non-institutionalists”) to **accommodate you**, and **we don’t believe we can**
6. So I believe that **my participation in sin or error** is a factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship
- H. “Would forbearance in continuing fellowship in some situation seem to **condone what we believe to be error**?”
1. 2 Jn. 9-11: ⁹ Whoever **transgresses** and **does not abide** in the **doctrine of Christ does not have God**. He who **abides** in the **doctrine of Christ has both the Father and the Son**. ¹⁰ If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not **receive** him into your house nor **greet** him; ¹¹ for he who greets him **shares** in his evil deeds.
 2. What I’m saying is that in making fellowship decisions we might need to consider **how our decisions will be interpreted by others** including the person we believe is wrong
 - a. *J. W. McGarvey* (Observation made to Jesse Sewell): “You are on the right road, and whatever you do, don’t ever let anybody persuade you that you can **successfully combat error by fellowshipping it and going along with it**. I have tried. I believed at the start that was the only way to do it. I’ve never held membership in a congregation that used instrumental music. I have, however, accepted invitations to preach without distinction between churches that used it and churches that didn’t. I’ve gone along with papers and magazines and things of that sort. During these years I have taught the truth as the New Testament teaches it to every young preacher who has passed through the College of the Bible. Yet, I do not know of more than six of those men who are preaching the truth today. **It won’t work.**” (Bold emphasis added, As told to Jesse Sewell in 1902 or 1903. 1950 *Harding College Lectures*)
 3. While Paul told the Corinthians that **eating meat** that had been sacrificed to idols was **not wrong per se** (1 Cor. 8:4, 8):
 - a. He condemned eating meat if it **violates your conscience**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 8:7: ⁷ However, *there is* not in everyone that knowledge; for some, with consciousness of the idol, until now eat *it* as a thing offered to an idol; and **their conscience, being weak, is defiled**.

- b. He condemned eating meat if it causes a weak brother to **violate his conscience**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 8:9-13: ⁹ But beware lest somehow this **liberty** of yours become a **stumbling block** to those who are weak. ¹⁰ For if anyone **sees** you who have knowledge eating in an idol's temple, will not the **conscience** of him who is **weak** be **emboldened** to eat those things offered to idols? ¹¹ And because of your knowledge shall the **weak brother perish**, for whom Christ died? ¹² But when you thus **sin against the brethren**, and **wound their weak conscience**, you **sin against Christ**. ¹³ Therefore, if **food** makes my brother **stumble**, I will **never again eat meat**, lest I make my brother **stumble**.
- c. He condemned **eating meat in an idol's temple** because it amounted to **fellowship with demons**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 10:19-22: ¹⁹ What am I saying then? That **an idol is anything**, or **what is offered to idols is anything**? ²⁰ Rather, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice they sacrifice to **demons** and not to **God**, and I do not want you to have **fellowship with demons**. ²¹ You cannot drink the **cup of the Lord** and the **cup of demons**; you cannot partake of the **Lord's table** and of the **table of demons**. ²² Or do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? Are we stronger than He?
- d. He condemned **eating meat** in a situation when it was **questioned by others**
 - 1) 1 Cor. 10:24-29: ²⁴ Let no one **seek his own**, but each one **the other's well-being**. ²⁵ Eat whatever is **sold in the meat market**, asking **no questions** for conscience' sake; ²⁶ for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." ²⁷ If any of those who **do not believe** invites you to **dinner**, and you desire to go, **eat** whatever is set before you, asking **no question** for conscience' sake. ²⁸ But if anyone says to you, "**This was offered to idols**," **do not eat** it for the sake of **the one** who told you, and for **conscience' sake**; for "the earth is the LORD's, and all its fullness." ²⁹ "**Conscience**," I say, not your **own**, but that of **the other**. For why is my **liberty** judged by **another man's conscience**?

I. "Does extending or continuing fellowship **encourage those who are causing divisions**?"

- 1. If so, **it must not be granted** in the first place, or **it must be withdrawn** if it has been extended
 - a. Rom. 16:17-18: ¹⁷ Now I urge you, brethren, **note** those who cause divisions and offenses, contrary to the doctrine which you learned, and **avoid** them. ¹⁸ For those who are such do not serve our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly, and by smooth words and flattering speech deceive the hearts of the simple.
 - b. Tit. 3:10-11: ¹⁰ **Reject a divisive man** after the first and second admonition, ¹¹ knowing that such a person is warped and sinning, being self-condemned.

J. “Is this matter one that will involve or adversely affect **the entire congregation** or only **the individual** we disagree with?”

1. From my viewpoint, there is some difference between **someone who doesn't believe we should have divided Bible classes and therefore doesn't attend those, and someone who insists that the church cannot have any classes** (which I think would be detrimental to the congregation)
2. There is also a difference when **someone personally and individually uses his money in ways I don't agree with**, and when **someone involves all members by insisting that money be used out of the church's treasury**
3. There is a difference when someone personally and individually uses **instrumental music in private worship** and when **instrumental music is made a part of the public worship assembly**
 - a. Now, I believe that using **instrumental music in worship is unauthorized** whether we're talking about individual or collective worship, but if someone uses it in the privacy of their own home, that **doesn't affect me**
 - b. I can worship and work with them in a local church, because their **private practice** (that I believe is wrong) does not **involve or affect** me or what we do together collectively
4. Note: I'm not saying that whether something is an **individual matter** or a **congregational matter** is the **only question** we have to answer (I'll explain more about that later)
5. But in some situations whether the issue **only involves the individual** or the **entire congregation** may be a significant factor

K. “Is the disagreement over something that God **permits** but neither **requires** or **forbids**? ”

1. **Marriage** is something that is **permitted** but **not required**
 - a. 1 Cor. 7:27-28: ²⁷ Are you **bound** to a wife? Do not seek to be **loosed**. Are you **loosed** from a wife? Do not **seek** a wife. ²⁸ But even if you **do marry**, you have **not sinned**; and if a virgin **marries**, she has **not sinned**. Nevertheless such will have trouble in the flesh, but I would spare you.
 - b. 1 Cor. 7:36-37: ³⁶ But if any man thinks he is behaving improperly toward his virgin, if she is past the flower of youth, and thus it must be, let him do what he wishes. He does not sin; **let them marry**. ³⁷ Nevertheless he who stands steadfast in his heart, having no necessity, but has power over his own will, and has so determined in his heart that he will keep his virgin, does well.
 - c. This means that if someone with a right to marry **chooses to marry** and someone else **chooses not to marry** neither have **done anything wrong**

2. Romans 14 makes it very clear that in cases where **no sin** is involved, there should be **no division** (cf. Rom. 14:1-4, 6, 18; 15:1-2, 5-6)
- L. “Is this issue **merely academic** or one that carries **damaging, practical, real-life consequences**?”
 1. What we may view as erroneous teaching about whether **people personally baptized by John the Baptist had to be re-baptized** has no practical consequence, since it doesn’t apply to anyone alive today
 2. What practical consequences will accrue if a man is wrong about **when the book of Revelation was written**?
 - a. While the interpretation and explanation of some of the symbols in the book will **differ**, depending upon whether you are an early, middle, or late dater, the **overall message** of the book for Christians today **remains the same**
 3. On the other hand, erroneous teaching about **MDR** has **serious consequences** no matter what view you hold
 - a. According to some views of MDR, some people in second marriages are **committing adultery**
 - b. According to other views of MDR, Christians who insist that some in second marriages dissolve those unions are **separating what God has joined together**
 - c. Therefore, teaching on MDR has **damaging, practical, real-life consequences**
 4. Furthermore, if someone holds a view on **MDR** that I believe is **erroneous**, that belief alone, in and of itself, would not necessarily have any **practical real-life consequences** in a local church unless and until either of two things occurred:
 - a. A **MDR case** arises in which this erroneous view **applies** and it is **bound** on others
 - b. This erroneous view became a “**hobby**” that was **pushed** at every possible opportunity to such an extent that it **disrupted the peace and unity of the local church**
 - c. Objection: What about the **potential for problems** on down the road?
 - 1) That’s an **excellent question**, and we need to be concerned about “**potential problems**” but:
 - a) Should we **shoot all the bears in the forest**, because one could potentially maul a hiker to death?
 - b) Should we **quit driving our cars** on the highway, because we could potentially have an accident?

- 2) Furthermore, we need to remember that this is **not the only factor** we need to consider when it comes to **fellowship**?
- 5. So I believe that whether the issue is **practical** or **merely academic** is another factor to consider in making decisions about fellowship

Conclusion:

- I. As you think about these considerations, you need to realize that **no single factor** can be the **only determining factor** in decisions about **maintaining or breaking fellowship**
 - A. Although someone's **sincerity** is **an important factor** to consider, it is **not the only factor** that must be considered
 - 1. If someone sincerely worships **false gods** or enters an **adulterous marriage**, other pertinent factors would require a **severing of fellowship**
 - B. Although fellowship might be maintained in some situations if **only the individual and not the entire congregation is involved**, that would not be the case in every situation
 - 1. If a Christian came to believe that **Jesus was not divine**, the individual nature of his error would not be a legitimate reason to **maintain fellowship**
 - C. Point: We just can't decide **all the issues** of fellowship by **answering one single question**
- II. So in this lesson, I've tried to help you see that **decisions about fellowship** must be made in light of **various factors and considerations**
 - A. In some cases, we might only have to **look at one single factor** to make the decision that fellowship cannot continue
 - B. In other cases, we might reach that conclusion only after **carefully considering several different factors**
 - C. In still other cases, after looking at **all relevant factors**, we may decide that in spite of some disagreement, **fellowship can continue temporarily** or perhaps **indefinitely**
- III. I believe that the question of fellowship is a “**sticky wicket**,” and I don’t for a moment believe that this lesson **solves all the problems**; nor do I believe that **these guidelines** are necessarily the **only ones** we should use, but I hope that this study will **shed some light** on a difficult subject

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Excerpt From *The Indwelling Of Deity*
By Maurice Lusk, III

Reasoning and Belief

No man has the right to expect his position to be accepted or respected if he cannot produce adequate evidence to substantiate it. If one holds a position he thinks valid and sound, then he must present the evidence or logical argumentation warranting the conclusion he has drawn. Simply affirming that he “believes” a certain thing to be true is not enough. A Christian preacher or teacher has no more right to expect his assertions to be accepted without substantiation than does an agnostic or atheistic professor.

“Shall we be rational or irrational in our belief?” this is the real question. Shall we draw the conclusions, and only those conclusions, warranted by the evidence; or shall we hold whatever positions we please no matter how logically inconsistent or indefensible they may be? And by the same token, one cannot seriously challenge or refute a position with which he disagrees by simply pronouncing it “wrong;” nor can he make an argument any less true by throwing his hands over his eyes crying, “I can’t see it!” If one cannot substantiate his position by logical argumentation nor remove the difficulties raised in a refutation of his position, he has no right to lay claims to rationality while continuing to affirm that position. To insist that belief doesn’t need “reasons” is to reveal a totally inadequate concept of biblical belief. God has not asked us to believe anything for which he hasn’t given us adequate evidence. One comes to the conclusions he does because the evidence logically leads him there, not because he has “leaped in faith” to the conclusions he desires to hold; such a practice is irrational and strikes at the very heart of the religion of biblical revelation. (Bold emphasis added, p. ii)

Every truth of Scripture should be determined by the employment of a thoroughgoing exegetical analysis of the biblical teaching on that issue (exegesis), and interpretation of the exegetical data in light of established principles of interpretation (hermeneutics), and the laws of valid reasoning (logic).

In the following pages this writer will set before the reader exegetical data with which the reader must reckon on the issue of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, with the conclusions drawn by this writer as demanded by the laws of valid reasoning.

We would remind the reader before we proceed into the following chapters, one cannot convince someone of something of which he does not desire to be convinced. One may, however, set his evidence before rational and responsible minds with the conclusions that follow from his evidence. If the evidence or argumentation is unestablished or fallacious, the reader has no obligation to accept it. If, on the other hand, the evidence or argumentation cannot be refuted, the rational and responsible mind must accept it or fall under the indictment of irrationality.

Once one sets the precedent of drawing conclusions without adequate evidence to support them, he leaves himself without the right to object to any position advanced by anyone. All things become a matter of personal preference, and he has no criterion by which to determine anything

true or false. If, however, he insists that one ought to “prove” his assertions true (i.e., present adequate argumentation or evidence supporting his conclusions), he then, and only then, has a valid means of determining the truthfulness or falsity of any matter whether exegetical, theological, philosophical, practical, etc.

It would be difficult to say why anyone would want to reject such a principle of valid reasoning or thinking as the law of rationality. Perhaps, if one recognized or accepted such a standard of evaluating the validity or soundness of his thinking, he may find himself having to give up some things he simply “wants” to believe; regardless of the fact that he cannot prove them true. No man turns against reason (i.e., principles and/or laws of valid reasoning) until reason turns against him. (**Bold emphasis added, pp. 5-6**)