

THE SCOPE AND LIMITS OF FELLOWSHIP

Fellowship is not without its limits. God cannot, and will not, fellowship that which is contrary to His nature (1 John 1:5-6). We must be careful to determine the scriptural scope and limit of our own spiritual fellowship. If we strive to be in fellowship with God, the scope and limits of our fellowship should be exactly what He has revealed.

I) **The Distinction Between Love and Acceptance**

- A) God loves all men (John 3:16; Rom. 5:8), but God will not accept [fellowship] those who are unrighteous (1 Cor. 6:9-10; Acts 10:35)
- B) We must love all men (Matt. 5:44; Rom. 13:9-10), but we must not accept and approve of those who act ungodly (2 Cor. 6:14; 1 Pet. 4:3-4; Eph. 5:5-11)

II) **The Scope (Extent) of our Spiritual Fellowship**

- A) Our spiritual fellowship exists with any fellow Christian that we have an opportunity to share and jointly participate with *in the Lord* (according to His divine will)
 - 1) Within a local church (Eph. 4:15-16)
 - 2) Between individuals near and far (Gal. 2:7-9; Acts 15:35-40)

III) **The Limits of our Individual Spiritual Fellowship**

- A) Fellowship is maintained on the basis of our unity in the essentials of God's word
- B) A Christian must not fellowship the works of darkness nor those who practice them (Eph. 5:5-7, 11; Rom. 1:32; 2 Cor. 6:14-16)
- C) A Christian must not fellowship a teacher of false doctrine (2 Jn. 9-11)

IV) **Limits of Fellowship in the Local Church**

- A) A local congregation is to believe, speak, and apply God's truth in the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3)
- B) A congregation cannot fellowship those "who cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine" (Rom. 16:17)
- C) A congregation must not fellowship one who is immoral or walks disorderly ["out of rank" according to the truth] (1 Cor. 5:1-5; 2 Thess. 3:6-15; Rev. 2:20)
- D) Fellowship is to be withdrawn from an unrepentant brother/sister who is:
 - 1) Walking "disorderly" and not according to truth (2 Thess. 3:6)
 - 2) Involved in immorality (1 Cor. 5:11)
 - 3) Divisive due to selfish disregard for truth (Rom. 16:17-18; 1 Tim. 6:3-5; Titus 3:9-11)
 - 4) Guilty of sin against a brother/sister (Matt. 18:15-17; Lk. 17:3)
 - 5) ***This action is of utmost seriousness*** – it may be necessary that we withhold or withdraw the precious spiritual fellowship (association, sharing) that we have with one another in Christ, but this is absolutely necessary to glorify God, uphold His true ways, protect ourselves from the leaven of sin, and shame/rebuke the sinner unto repentance; God understands this serious and difficult action (Gen. 3:22-24; Hos. 5:6)!

Conclusion

We must be careful not to extend or limit our fellowship in ways that would violate God's will. This requires careful and fair application of these Bible principles and a love for the souls of brethren and non-Christians. May God help us glorify Him in our lives and fellowship.