

# Sound in the Faith

by Bob Pulliam

## Lesson 10

## Fellowship



Memory Verses: John 8:31; II Timothy 2:15 (KJV); Ephesians 1:22f;  
Ephesians 5:19; Ephesians 4:4; Matthew 15:9

**F**ellowship is a very important concept in the Scriptures. And it is a difficult one for a people who are continually being indoctrinated in a society of political correctness. The politically correct refuse to call error what it is. As a result, sin is tolerated. Homosexuality is a classic example of this. The Bible calls it a sin. But there are some who want to make it a crime to call homosexuality a sin. These kinds of laws have already been passed in Canada, and there are legislators in the United States who want to do the same. Society is teaching us to overlook sin. But the scriptures teach us not to have fellowship with sin.

### *A General Look at the Concept of Fellowship...*

The word “fellowship” simply refers to a *partnership*. Generally, it can refer to any endeavor of life where people work or play together. “Fellowship” is always engaged in by the agreement of two or more parties. When we talk about fellowship with sin, we are not necessarily talking about engaging in the sin. You might think of it like an accomplice to a crime. Take, for example, a case where a man robs a bank. He is shot in the getaway and goes to a doctor. That doctor did not rob the bank. He was not even present. But agreeing to treat the bank robber without turning him in would make him an accomplice after the fact. He becomes a partner to the crime. In this regard, we must be careful about who we “agree” with in our actions. You wouldn’t dream of participating in evil. But would you approve of someone else’s error by helpful actions (or lack of action)?

We have a tendency to fear that people will not like us if we do not engage in their sins. And this is usually true. Peter wrote of this, when he said, “*In regard to these, they think it strange that you do not run with them in the same flood of dissipation, speaking evil of you.*” (I Pt 4:4) Everyone wants to be liked; but we must be sure that our primary concern

is God's disposition toward us. If we turn to the people of the world for our approval, we are selling out God to gain friends in this world.

This concept does not begin in the New Testament. As we turn back into the pages of the Old Testament, we find God instructing the Israelites in this way, too. For example, He said:

*“You shall utterly destroy all the places where the nations which you shall dispossess served their gods, on the high mountains and on the hills and under every green tree. And you shall destroy their altars, break their sacred pillars, and burn their wooden images with fire; you shall cut down the carved images of their gods and destroy their names from that place.” (Dt 12:2f)*

And along with that:

*“Therefore take careful heed to yourselves, that you love the Lord your God. Or else, if indeed you do go back, and cling to the remnant of these nations; these that remain among you; and make marriages with them, and go in to them and they to you, know for certain that the Lord your God will no longer drive out these nations from before you. But they shall be snares and traps to you, and scourges on your sides and thorns in your eyes, until you perish from this good land which the Lord your God has given you.” (Josh 23:11-13)*

These passages tell us that God has always expected His people to be careful about who they associate with. It was of vital importance that the Israelites not become friends with the nations who had dwelt in the land before them. Their evil ways would “rub off” on God's people. And as we look ahead to how these things turned out, we discover that God was exactly right. His people began to worship their gods, and follow their idolatrous customs. Perhaps the best example of this was king Solomon. Here was the wisest man who ever lived (aside from Jesus). And yet he fell prey to the fellowships God had warned of (I Kgs 11:7-9). The people, in general, also fell prey to this error, setting up places of idol worship, and allowing perverted persons to remain in the land (I Kgs 14:22-24).

As we turn to the New Testament, the Lord gives us the same concept of fellowship held in the Old Testament. For example, Paul wrote, *“Do not be unequally yoked together with unbelievers. For what fellowship has righteousness with lawlessness? And what communion has light with darkness? And what accord has Christ with Belial? Or what part has a believer with an unbeliever?”* (II Cor 6:14f) Later in this same context, he went on to write, *“Therefore ‘Come out from among them And be*

*separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, And I will receive you.’ “ (II Cor 6:17).*

People tend to think as the Israelites of old. But God has warned us against allying ourselves with people of the world; and we must not forget that He knows better. Does this mean that I must have nothing to do with unbelievers? No! How would I ever influence and convert those with whom I never have contact? We are not to “yoke” ourselves together with them. Being “yoked” would be accomplished by participating with them in sin. But we can also become accomplices to their sin by seeming to approve, or remaining silent.

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### ***Question Set Number One***

- 1) We are continually indoctrinated in a society of...
- 2) What do the politically correct do?
- 3) What happens as a result?
- 4) What do some want to make a crime?
- 5) What is society teaching us?
- 6) What do the scriptures teach us?
- 7) What does the word fellowship mean?
- 8) It is always engaged in by what?
- 9) To have fellowship with sin, you must actually engage in it. T F
- 10) How might we approve of someone else’s error?
  
- 11) What do we have a tendency to fear?
  
- 12) What are we doing if we turn to people of this world for approval?
  
- 13) O.T. passages tell us that God always expected what?
  
- 14) What wise king did not do what God expected of him?
- 15) Paul tells us not to be what with unbelievers?
- 16) He commanded the Corinthians to...
  
- 17) We must have nothing to do with unbelievers. T F
- 18) What can I never do without contact?
- 19) What are we not to do with them?
- 20) How would we do this?
- 21) But we could also become accomplices by...

## *Two Areas of Fellowship...*

As we begin to concentrate on what the New Testament says, we need to introduce the fact that there are two areas of fellowship to consider. There is *individual* fellowship; and there is *collective* fellowship. Individual fellowship concerns the individual Christian, and his everyday life. Collective fellowship concerns the church, and what it engages in, or approves.

### *Individual Fellowship...*

We have already discussed, in past lessons, the fellowship of an individual Christian. But let's go on to emphasize the importance of this subject. John told his readers to "*walk in the light as He is in the light*" (I Jn 1:7). He went on to say that if we do so, we have fellowship with Jesus. The choice is, fellowship with Jesus, or fellowship with the world around us. Later, John said that if we love the world, the love of the Father is not in us (I Jn 2:15). James put it this way: "*...friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God.*" (Jms 4:4)

One of the great problems with making friends with the world is that we become conformed to it. Paul told the Romans, "*do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind*" (Rom 12:2). Many draw the faulty conclusion that if they get in among the people of the world, and live like them, they can convert them to the Lord. They forget that the same lusts of the flesh which hold unbelievers in the world also are at work to draw us away from God (I Jn 2:16f). There is an enemy within every one of us. God has demanded that we draw a line so that we not become like the Israelites of old. Perhaps they thought they could handle it; but in the end, God was proven right. Paul also wrote that, "*if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.*" (II Cor 5:17) If the old has passed away, and we are to live for the new, how can we continue to live in old ways? Just as Jesus said, "*No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.*" (Lk 9:62) Paul told the Ephesians:

*"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them. For it is shameful even to speak of those things which are done by them in secret. But all things that are exposed are made manifest by the light, for whatever makes manifest is light. Therefore He says: 'Awake, you who sleep,*

*Arise from the dead, And Christ will give you light.’ See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.” (Eph 5:11-16)*

Light and darkness are exclusive of each other. Both cannot exist in the same place at the same time. Where light appears, darkness is banished. Darkness is a metaphor for evil, and light stands for righteousness found in truth.

We are to count ourselves as creatures destined for heaven. When we lose sight of how precious that prize is, we begin to seek other prizes that this world has to offer.

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### ***Question Set Number Two***

- 1) What are the two areas of fellowship?
  - a)
  - b)
- 2) What did John tell readers to do?
- 3) If we do so, what did John say that we have?
- 4) This leaves us with a choice between what two things:
  - a)
  - b)
- 5) What is true if we love the world?
- 6) James said that friendship with the world is what?
- 7) What is one great problem with making friends of the world?
- 8) Paul told the Romans not to be what?
- 9) Instead, they were to what?
- 10) What do many think they can do by living like the world?
- 11) What is at work in unbelievers, that also work on believers to draw them away?
- 12) What are we, if we are in Christ?
- 13) What can we not do, once we take the plow?
- 14) The Ephesians were to have no fellowship with...
- 15) What were they to do instead?
- 16) Where light appears, darkness is \_\_\_\_\_
- 17) Darkness stands for \_\_\_\_\_.
- 18) Light stands for \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_.
- 19) What should we count ourselves as destined for?

## *Fellowship and the Church...*

The church is to maintain her purity in two ways. First, the church is to adorn the doctrine of the Lord in truth and righteousness. To abandon the truth for the ways of men is to remove Jesus as the head of the church. Secondly, the church is not to count a person as a member of the body if they are not in submission to the head (Jesus).

Remaining in fellowship with the Lord demands an attention to His commands. We have already studied this subject from the standpoint of the individual. But it is also true of the church. Jesus told the church at Ephesus, *“Nevertheless I have this against you, that you have left your first love. Remember therefore from where you have fallen; repent and do the first works, or else I will come to you quickly and remove your lampstand from its place; unless you repent.”* (Rev 2:4f) They had lost their zeal for the Lord. He has good things to say about them; but this one aspect threatens the fellowship that they shared with Him. Removing their lampstand was symbolic of His no longer walking in and out among them (Rev 1:12f & 20). It was essential that they turn to serve Him with their former zeal.

But zeal is not all that is necessary. We’ve learned in past lessons that worship becomes vain when we teach as doctrine the commandments of men (Mt 15:8f). The Jews had not been careful to follow the law of Moses as God had given it. So, a few verses later, we find Jesus rebuking them with these words: *“Every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be uprooted.”* (Mt 15:13) In every period of human history, God has given mankind an understanding of what He wants. And it is no exception today, as we are to worship Him in spirit and *in truth* (Jn 4:24). When we fail to follow the truth of God’s word, we resort to error, and depart from purity. It is God’s will that the church remain pure (II Cor 11:2f). God’s people should always seek to carry out that desire.

Concerning the church, you will oftentimes hear people use the word “fellowship” of eating a common meal. And thus, some churches have “fellowship halls”, where they get together for a meal. But you will never find the word “fellowship” used that way of the church’s work. The word *fellowship* was used of the church in a very focused way. To begin with, it was used of the sharing, or partnership, in relieving the needs of other saints (Acts 2:42-45; II Cor 8:4). It was also used of churches supporting the preaching of the gospel (Phil 1:5). There was a partnership in these endeavors as the truth was taught. Sending support to someone teaching error would have been very undesirable (I Jn 4:1; I Tim 5:22). As we saw at the beginning of this lesson, the word “fellowship” can generally mean any kind of partnership. But when it is used of the church in the New

Testament, it is confined to the work of the church and spiritual matters. Never is it used of a meal, or a ball game.

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*Question Set Number Three*

- 1) In what two ways is the church to maintain purity in fellowship?
  - a)
  - b)
- 2) Fellowship with the Lord demands an attention to...
- 3) What had the church at Ephesus left?
- 4) What would the Lord do?
- 5) What was this symbolic of?
- 6) When does worship become vain?
- 7) How are we to worship God today?
- 8) When we resort to error, we depart from what?
- 9) Many people incorrectly use the word “fellowship” of...
- 10) Two ways that “fellowship” is used of the church in the N.T.:
  - a)
  - b)
- 11) The word “fellowship” is never used of...

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*Church Discipline...*

As unpleasant as it is, there is a need for discipline, of a negative nature, among God’s people. To allow error to go unrebuked among God’s people can have disastrous results. For this reason, the word of God has not left the subject up to our likes and dislikes. Instead, God has given us instruction on this matter.

At times, a problem may arise where someone has sinned against his brother (Mt 18:15-20). When that occurs, the offended party is to try to work it out with the sinner. If that cannot be done, then a process is undertaken which ends in the situation being made known to the church. If the church cannot prevail upon the sinner to repent, then he is to be “like a heathen and a tax collector”. In other words, they are to treat him as a sinner, rather than acting as if all is well. He is never to be treated as an

enemy (Gal 6:1ff). Instead, the faithful are to admonish as opportunities arise.

But then there are situations where the church was already knowledgeable of the sin committed. It was known in the community, and reflected on the purity of the church. These were commanded to take action immediately (I Cor 5). This was not only an effort to bring the sinner to his senses; but also to keep the error from spreading. Paul likened sin to leaven, which seems a small thing, but affects the whole (I Cor 5:6ff). He also commanded the Thessalonians to mark those who did not obey the word, and to not keep company with them (II Th 3:14f; see also v6).

It is not a pleasant process. But it is done out of love for the sinner, and love for the Lord's church. To allow a sinner to continue on his course is a death sentence. To rebuke him is to offer life and peace. James wrote, *"let him know that he who turns a sinner from the error of his way will save a soul from death and cover a multitude of sins."* (Jms 5:20)

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#### ***Question Set Number Four***

- 1) What results when error goes unrebuked?
  - 2) We have no choice in this matter because...
  - 3) If the church cannot turn the sinner, he is to be...
  
  - 4) He is never to be treated as an...
  - 5) What are the faithful to do?
  - 6) When sin is already known to the church and the community, that sin reflects on what?
  - 7) When was action to be taken in these circumstances?
  - 8) Paul likened sin to what?
  - 9) What two things did Paul command the Thessalonians?
    - a)
    - b)
  - 10) This kind of discipline is done out of love for:
    - a)
    - b)
  - 11) Rebuking a sinner is to offer him what?
  - 12) Turning a sinner does what two things?
    - a)
    - b)
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