

Seasonal Preaching Tract

Fellowship



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Reader Notes

indifference toward sin. In the case of a parent's child who has been disciplined due to their spiritual rebellion, God would not have that parent neglect their duties toward their child. However, God does not permit that parent to act in any way that would undermine the deliverance of the impenitent one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that their spirit might be saved (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:5). The same can be said for any other familial relationship. One must love the Lord more than any other (cf. Matthew 10:34-39), and one must love another's soul more than any other thing (cf. James 5:19-20).

It is never easy when a family member is being disciplined spiritually. Nothing hurts more than to have a spouse, child, sibling, or any other family member turn away from the Lord, and place their soul in jeopardy. It is a tragedy when such happens. In such cases, the love for their soul must surpass the love for social interaction. *"By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren"* (1 John 3:16). It may be that the life we must lay down for the sake of their spiritual well-being is the culmination of the simple, yet great pleasures of family relationships. If such in God's wisdom provides for their return to the Lord, we should be willing to make that sacrifice (cf. 2 Corinthians 2:6-8).

Terminology

The topic of "fellowship" is prominent in scripture. It is a simple concept, though it has been the seat of much controversy. Solomon said, *"there is nothing new under the sun"* (Ecclesiastes 1:9), and the same rings true with the problems surrounding fellowship. Even the first century church experienced trouble with the different applications of accepted and restricted practices of fellowship. There have been many in our day, both within and without the church, who have severely abused and misused passages of scripture concerning the topic. Let us not, as some do, suggest that God has left us in an unsettled predicament concerning any spiritual topic. *"That which is perfect has come"* (1 Corinthians 13:10), as it has been *"once for all delivered to the saints"* (Jude 3), and *"he who is spiritual"* can understand those things contained therein *"because they are spiritually discerned"* (1 Corinthians 2:14, 15). We must *"become a fool that [we] may become wise"* (1 Corinthians 3:18), and *"be diligent to present [ourselves] approved to God, [workers] who [do] not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth"* (2 Timothy 2:15).

It is prudent when considering any topic of scripture to investigate the terminology involved with the subject. "Fellowship" is a translation of three Greek words in the KJV and NKJV of the New Testament. This translation is found fifteen times. These three Greek words are as follows:

- *koinonia* – partnership, i.e. (literally) participation, or (social) intercourse, or (pecuniary) benefaction: – (to) communicate(-ation), communion, (contri-) distribution, fellowship. (Strong) (Acts 2:42; 1 Corinthians 1:9; 8:4; 10:20 [*koinanos*, akin to *koinonia*] Galatians 2:9; Ephesians 3:9; Philippians 1:5; 2:1; 3:10; 1 John 1:3[twice], 6, 7) (Other translations: contribution, communion, sharing, share, partaker, partner, companion)
- *metache* – participation, i.e. intercourse: – fellowship. (Strong) (2 Corinthians 6:14)

- *sygkainonea* – to share in company with, i.e. co-participate in: – communicate (have fellowship) with, be partaker of. (Strong) (Ephesians 5:11) (Other translations: shared in, share)

As is noted in the above definitions given by Strong, fellowship has to do with commonality. When individuals have something in common, or they have, or share in something with someone else, they have fellowship with each other. Also, fellowship is something practiced as indicated by the verb *sygkainonea*, and the verb forms of *koinonia* and *metoche*. Fellowship is a commonality or involvement with something or someone, or it is a joint participation with others, either lawfully or otherwise.

In Luke's gospel account, when Jesus was teaching from a boat on the Lake of Gennesaret, after telling Simon to let down the nets for a catch, and having caught an immense volume of fish, the account reads, *"So they signaled to their partners [metochas] in the other boat to come and help them. And they came and filled both the boats, so that they began to sink"* (Luke 5:7). Also in verse 10, *"and so also (astonished) were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, who were partners [kainanos] with Simon."* This passage speaks of the partnership the men had in matters of business as fellow fishermen. When two or more share in the same matter they have "fellowship." As is indicated in the previous passage, the term "fellowship" and its related words are not inherently spiritual terms. Two have fellowship as they eat together, work together, or do any other thing together. However, when used in the New Testament the term primarily deals with spiritual relationships and interactions.

The apostle John gave his reason for writing his epistle saying, *"that which we have seen and heard (the Word of life) we declare to you, that you also may have fellowship [koinonia] with us; and truly our fellowship [koinonia] is with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ"* (1 John 1:3). In this verse, John described two relationships. One was vertical – God and man; the other was horizontal – man and man. These are not physical relationships as before with Simon, James and

ion between Paul and Alexander, but a difference concerning the truth. Alexander had strayed from the truth, and was noted by Paul in his letter to Timothy. For Timothy, and the church where he resided, to ignore Paul's words and receive Alexander would be to rebel against God. For Alexander was not received by God. The same can be said concerning Hymenaeus, and Philetus (cf. 1 Timothy 1:20; 2 Timothy 2:17). Church autonomy does not sanction the reception of those who are in rebellion against God. Furthermore, the warning concerning those who have strayed from the truth does not violate autonomy. Paul wrote the church in Corinth concerning one of their own who had departed from the truth (cf. 1 Corinthians 5). They continued fellowship with him unlawfully, as he was impenitent concerning his sexual immorality. The standard for receiving anyone remains the same from congregation to congregation – has God received this person (cf. 1 John 1:3)?

Family

When discussing or practicing church discipline, often there are questions raised regarding familial relationships. How are family members to conduct themselves in situations where a relative has been withdrawn from, and is unfaithful to the Lord? Are family members of the one who has been disciplined exempt from involvement in the disciplinary actions?

Some allow their biological relationship to have precedence rather than their spiritual relationship. However, even family members have the obligation to do that which is necessary to submit to God in this category of church discipline, and to do that which is necessary for the spiritual well-being of the fallen. There are responsibilities God holds us to as members of a family (cf. Ephesians 5:22-6:4; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; 1 Timothy 5:8; etc.). These must not be compromised in the name of church discipline. However, there must never be the sense of toleration, or indifference toward sin. *"Not even to eat with such a person"* (1 Corinthians 5:11), and *"receiv[ing] him into your house nor greet[ing] him"* (2 John 10) both consider any action which would imply a willful ignorance of, acceptance of, or

day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:5).

Discipline is not enjoyable, but it is necessary. Willful ignorance, and indifference toward sin in the church is unacceptable. Receiving those whom God has not received is tantamount to sharing with them in their evil deeds (cf. 2 John 9-11). Love is not shown through tolerating sin to spare the sinner from discomfort, but in exposing their sin and calling them to repentance (cf. James 5:19-20; Acts 8:18-24). *"And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather expose them"* (Ephesians 5:11).

Autonomy

"Autonomy" comes from the Greek word *"autonomia."* *"Autonomia"* combines *"autos"* (self), and *"nomos"* (law). Literally, "autonomy" means self-law. The design of the local church is autonomous, or self-governing. Each congregation has its own elders appointed by God, and is governed by them. *"Shepherd the flock of God which is among you"* (1 Peter 5:2). See also Acts 14:23; 20:28. However, it is imperative to understand that each congregation in its autonomy is still subject to the Chief Shepherd – Jesus (cf. 1 Peter 5:4). Church autonomy is not a design for progressivism, but for adherence to the truth. It does not grant liberty for each congregation to do as it pleases. Rather, it ensures that any congregation's departure from the truth does not affect any other congregation whose desire is still to submit to God. Each congregation has its own lampstand, but there is one standard which must be followed in order to keep it in its place.

There are some who operate under the label of "church autonomy" to receive those who have been marked and disciplined by other congregations. This is wrong. Church autonomy does not exempt any congregation from adherence to any facet of Christ's doctrine, fellowship included. The apostle Paul wrote to Timothy, *"Alexander the coppersmith did me much harm. May the Lord repay him according to his works. You also must beware of him, for he has greatly resisted our words"* (2 Timothy 4:14-15). Such was not simply a difference of opin-

John, but spiritual. And as they are both spiritual relationships, they themselves are dependent on each other. One cannot be had without the other. In order for his readers to have fellowship with God, John declared unto them *"the Word of life."* This Word is He who was in the beginning, and serves as the only way to the Father (cf. John 1:1-5; 14:6). He is manifest in *"the gospel of Christ...the power of God to salvation for everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16), which when obeyed delivers one out of the *"power of darkness"* and conveys one *"into the kingdom of the Son of [God's] love"* (Colossians 1:13). Therefore, John wrote that they could remain unmoved in that state with God, and as such remain unmoved in their state with him and the rest of the apostles. Which is why he continued saying, *"God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship [koinonia] with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship [koinonia] with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1:5-7). For one to say he has fellowship with God while walking in darkness is to lie, for God is light. There is no commonality between light and darkness, thus no commonality between God and one who walks in darkness. However, when one walks in light he is in fellowship with God who is light, and as such with all others who walk in light and are in fellowship with God.

As indicated in 1 John 1:1-4, fellowship with God occurs when one has *"the Word of life"* declared unto him, and he reacts properly in faithful obedience. That fellowship is maintained with God as long as the commonality of light is maintained. While fellowship with God exists, one enjoys fellowship with anyone else who is also in fellowship with God. It is then that fellowship becomes an action that should be taken. Because a common relationship with God is shared, there can and should be a joint participation, or "fellowship" with others in those things which are included in that relationship with God. We see this occur between Christians upon the establishment of the church in Acts 2. *"Those who gladly received [Peter's] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them"* (Acts 2:41). It was at the point of baptism that their sins

were washed away, and they were added to the body of Christ. It was at that point that they entered into fellowship with God. Due to their fellowship with God in being added to Christ's body, they also entered into fellowship with each other. Their relationship with God was a commonality between them. Paul wrote about this saying, *"For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit. For in fact the body is not one member but many"* (1 Corinthians 12:13-14). They were added to the same body and were thus *"individually members of one another"* (Romans 12:5). Therefore, they began to function together, or participate together, or have fellowship together. The account continues, *"And they continued steadfastly in...fellowship [koinonia]"* (Acts 2:42). It was at this point they began to participate, commune, share, distribute, contribute, associate, partake together, and have fellowship together in spiritual matters.

The term "fellowship" is easily understood. It considers commonality, partnership, joint participation, etc. However, questions arise concerning the topic that need to be answered. Who has fellowship with God? Who can we have fellowship with? Etc. We must turn to scripture for the answers so as to avoid venturing beyond that which is written (cf. 1 Corinthians 4:6).

tion" (Strong). It is worthy to note that the withdrawal from those who are disorderly (cf. 2 Thessalonians 3:6) is not the first step in discipline. The doctrine, reproof, correction, and instruction in righteousness received from the inspired scripture is disciplinary (cf. 2 Timothy 3:16-17). Anytime God's word is taught, discipline is given and received.

Further stages of discipline are reached when individuals fail to submit to the initial discipline of inspired teaching. This is the restoration of the erring. *"Brethren, if anyone among you wanders from the truth, and someone turns him back, 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"* (James 5:19-20). However, restoring one in a spirit of gentleness who has been overtaken in any trespass (cf. Galatians 6:1) is not the same as bidding one who does not bring the doctrine of Christ *"God speed"* (2 John 10, KJV). The effort is to *"[turn] a sinner from the error of his way,"* not to maintain a relationship despite the sin in which he continues. **Any effort taken to restore an erring brother must not be misconstrued as continued fellowship with sin and the sinner.** It is not the toleration of sin, rather, it is the expression of intolerance toward sin.

When efforts at restoration fail due to the obstinacy of the sinner, further efforts are to be taken. This process can be observed in Jesus' discussion of restoring an erring brother in Matthew 18:15-20. To gain back a brother who had sinned against another, several steps were taken. First, the sinner was approached concerning his sin by the one he sinned against (v. 15). If that failed, two or three witnesses accompanied the one seeking to restore the sinner (v. 16). Then, the conflict was brought before the church (v. 17a). Lastly, upon the failure of the first three attempts at restoration, the sinner was withdrawn from (v. 17b). At no point during the process was the sin tolerated. Each effort was a disciplinary action to turn the sinner away from sin, thus, to restore his soul. This includes the last step which Paul described elsewhere as *"deliver[ing] such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that his spirit may be saved in the*

Church Discipline

The topic of fellowship is included in our joy as Christians – having fellowship with God now, and having that fellowship consummated in eternity. For this reason, all that surrounds the topic, both the positive and the negative, is vital. Consideration of our fellowship with God, and fellowship with those of *“like precious faith”* (2 Peter 1:1) is a source of great encouragement. Therefore, when this fellowship is lost, or is threatened, there is a great need to address the problem in whatever way the scripture requires. This idea is expressed by Jude in his epistle – *“Beloved, while I was very diligent to write to you concerning our common salvation, I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints”* (Jude 3). It is beneficial and enjoyable to discuss our fellowship with God, but if that fellowship is in harm’s way we must protect it. Also, if that fellowship is already lost in another, we must work toward restoration.

Church discipline is a topic often neglected for the negative feelings it brings, and the uncomfortable situations to which it often tends. However, it is prudent to always keep in mind that the problem is not church discipline; the problem is sin. Church discipline is God’s wisdom at work against sin in the church. It is God’s way of molding us into righteous servants of His. *“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterward it yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it”* (Hebrews 12:11).

Any discussion of church discipline should be prefaced with the assertion that it is intended for good. It is naïve to suggest that any congregation can maintain or gain strength without church discipline. It is constantly needed. Webster defines discipline as, “training that corrects, molds, or perfects the mental faculties or moral character” (“Discipline.” Merriam-Webster.com. Merriam-Webster, n.d.). The Greek word, *paideia*, translated *“chastening,”* carries with it the same idea – “tutorage, i.e. education or training; by implication, disciplinary correc-

Fellowship with God

Fellowship considers commonality. Those who have something in common with each other have fellowship. Those who participate in a common practice with each other are having fellowship with each other. John’s first epistle shows two relationships when considering the topic of fellowship – *“fellowship with us”* (1 John 1:3), i.e. the apostles (other men), and *“fellowship with the Father and with His Son Jesus Christ”*. The former is a horizontal relationship which depends upon the latter, a vertical relationship. The vertical relationship between God and man is an absolute. There is no in-between, or gray area. There is either fellowship, or no fellowship. This relationship is ultimately personal. It is between each individual man and his God. However, the existence of fellowship, or lack thereof with God affects our fellowship with man – whether we are in fellowship with another, and subsequently whether we can lawfully engage in any action of fellowship with another. It is important, therefore, to understand the vertical relationship before giving attention to the horizontal relationship.

The beginning record states, *“So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them”* (Genesis 1:27). God is Spirit (cf. John 4:24), thus man is a spiritual being, as he is created in God’s image. It is also true that God is a moral being. He is morally upright as a matter of His nature – *“in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5). It is in this state that God created man – *“Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good”* (Genesis 1:31). As God is without darkness, being light, He created man without darkness. In the beginning, God was in fellowship with man whom He created, as they were both in the light.

It remains, however, that man was created by God as a free moral agent. God gave man the ability to choose for himself. Thus, to honor such a created characteristic in man, God established the first law. It was simple: *“Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you*

shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Genesis 2:16-17). By adhering to this simple law, man would bring God glory by fulfilling his created purpose (cf. Ecclesiastes 12:13). By failing to keep the law, man would fall short of said glory, and receive the consequences of his actions – death.

The serpent came, preyed on the woman's weakness, she gave to her husband to eat, and both came to know the guilt of failing God (cf. Genesis 3:8). This act of lawlessness is defined by John as sin (cf. 1 John 3:4). Isaiah describes what this act of lawlessness does with the vertical relationship between God and man – *"Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; Nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear. But your iniquities have separated you from your God; And your sins have hidden His face from you, so that He will not hear"* (Isaiah 59:1-2). When man sins, he is separated from his God. Our decision to walk in the darkness of sin severs us from the light. For, *"what communion has light with darkness"* (2 Corinthians 6:14)? James notes that separation is death, just as *"the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also"* (James 2:26). Spiritual death, which man experiences when he sins, is a separation from God. This is the death to which God referred when He gave His command to man in the beginning. When we determine to even dabble in darkness, we separate ourselves from God. All men have done this, and have experienced spiritual death (cf. Romans 3:23; 6:23).

While it was not God's desire that man whom He created would rebel against Him, His omniscience kept this instance from being a surprise. He knew sin would come, and had devised a plan *"before the foundation of the world"* (Ephesians 1:4); His *"eternal purpose"* (Ephesians 3:11). He told the serpent, *"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise His heel"* (Genesis 3:15). This was that Seed which was promised to Abram (cf. Genesis 12:3), and that Seed is Christ (cf. Galatians 3:16). *"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord"* (Romans 6:23).

This may be so. However, what is perhaps even more dangerous than a false teacher who has every intention of doing harm to the extent that his intentions are manifest, is the false teacher who has every intention of doing good, but comes bearing a destructive doctrine. We must be able to determine whether the doctrine any teacher brings is from God's word; whether that teacher appears as corrupt, or not. If his doctrine is not God's doctrine he is a false teacher.

Despite the clarity of God's word on the subject, there are still those who refuse to label others as "false teachers" even though their doctrine contradicts the Scripture. They will openly admit that the teacher is espousing a doctrine which is foreign to God's word, but will cling closer to the man's reputation than the truth. They will say things like, "This man should not be called a 'false teacher,' for he has done much good in God's kingdom, and fully intends to continue doing so even with the doctrine he presents now. It may be that he is mistaken, but he remains honest, and should not be marked with such a negative label." Firstly, a false doctrine is never harmless, even if it may come from an honestly mistaken person with good intentions. Peter described "false teachers" as those who *"bring in destructive heresies"* (2 Peter 2:1). Secondly, if the man is as honest as he is described, he will come to the knowledge of the truth, and reject such a doctrine which he used to champion. Paul said, *"when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ"* (Ephesians 3:4). He said we can *"all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God"* (4:12). It has been said before, **"When a man who is honestly mistaken hears the truth, he will either quit being mistaken or cease to be honest."**

A false teacher is simply one who teaches false doctrine. We are not to receive such men, lest we share in their evil deeds (cf. 2 John 9-11), and they sway those less practiced in the truth (cf. Hebrews 5:12-14; Ephesians 4:14; Matthew 18:6-7).

"Beware of false prophets, who come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravenous wolves. You will know them by their fruits. Do men gather grapes from thornbushes or figs from thistles? Even so, every good tree bears good fruit, but a bad tree bears bad fruit...Therefore by their fruits you will know them"(Matthew 7:15-17, 20). What constitutes "fruit" in this passage? Some would suggest it concerns the prophet's character. They are "false prophets" if they come bearing the fruit of dishonesty, extortion, covetousness, immorality, etc. Such would certainly make them worldly people, but do such fruits necessarily mean they are "false prophets" or teachers?

Consider Paul's description of those who *"preach Christ even from envy and strife...from selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to [his] chains"*(Philippians 1:15, 16). Firstly, how would Paul know that they act in such a way? They bear such fruit which can be seen. However, Paul continued, *"What then? Only that in every way, whether in pretense or in truth, Christ is preached; and in this I rejoice, yes, and will rejoice"*(v. 18). Did Paul rejoice in their teaching of false doctrine? Of course not! They taught the truth. Their teaching was with wicked intentions, but it was the truth. Were they "false teachers?" No. Were they walking in sin? Yes. The same point can be made concerning Peter. His actions which Paul referred to in Galatians 2:11-21 were reprehensible. They were not in line with the truth of God's word. However, this is the same Peter who taught the truth in Acts 15. His actions were inconsistent with the truth he taught, but he was not a false teacher.

What are the fruits by which Jesus said we would know the "false prophets?" Isaiah said, *"To the law and to the testimony! If they do not speak according to this word, it is because there is no light in them"*(Isaiah 8:20). In this same way Jesus said the false prophets would be exposed – *"To the law and to the testimony!"* Is the doctrine they bring consistent with the standard of God's word? If not, they are "false prophets." But someone will say, "But they come in sheep's clothing. That means they are dishonest, and intentionally seek to devour the sheep!"

All men at the accountable age are severed from fellowship with God due to their sin. However, *"the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God"*(Romans 11:33), along with His infinite love, made restoration of fellowship with Him possible. All men can be *"justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus, whom God set forth as a propitiation by His blood, through faith"*(Romans 3:24-25a). Through Christ's vicarious sacrifice, God is able to be *"just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus"*(Romans 3:26).

"[Jesus] Himself is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the whole world"(1 John 2:2). But His sacrifice only benefits those who have faith in Him. Such saving faith is built by the hearing of the word of God (cf. Romans 10:17). Through this gospel, God calls men *"into the fellowship of His Son, Jesus Christ our Lord"*(1 Corinthians 1:9). This gospel, once a mystery, *"has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets"*(Ephesians 3:5). Without obedience to and continued adherence to the gospel revealed by the Spirit, men cannot have fellowship with God. Thus, John wrote, *"that which we have seen and heard (concerning the Word of life) 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"*(1 John 1:3). Fellowship with the Father and the Son is destroyed by sin, and restored by obedient faith to the inspired word. Those who come to the knowledge of the truth are *"enlightened, and have tasted the heavenly gift, and have become partakers of the Holy Spirit"*(Hebrews 6:4). By *"drink [ing] into [the] one Spirit"*(1 Corinthians 12:13) men enjoy *"the communion of the Holy Spirit"*(2 Corinthians 13:14). Peter explained it all in this way: *"His divine power has given to us all things that pertain to life and godliness, through the knowledge of Him who called us by glory and virtue, by which have been given to us exceedingly great and precious promises, that through these you may be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust"*(2 Peter 1:3-4). When men follow God's word they share in the divine nature, or have fellowship with God.

However, it cannot be overemphasized that fellowship with God can be severed again just as soon as it is gained (cf. Acts 8:14-24). The Hebrew writer gave much attention to said possibility. He noted that the *"holy brethren"* had become *"partakers of the heavenly calling"* (Hebrews 3:1), but warned them about possessing *"an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God"* (v. 12). He continued, *"For we have become partakers of Christ if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast to the end"* (v. 14). The believer must continue in faithful obedience until the end. When one does not continue obediently, but turns from the truth, from the light, he once again severs himself from God. John wrote, *"If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth"* (1 John 1:6). It is possible that a Christian fail in weakness, succumbing to the lure of darkness. To this end, John continued to write, *"If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness"* (v. 9). When fellowship with God is severed when one takes a step in darkness, that one must turn his way back to the light, confess his sins and ask for forgiveness.

Ultimately, the contents of the Holy script focus on the restoration of fellowship between God and man, and how to maintain said fellowship until it is consummated in the eternal glory of heaven. We must not deceive ourselves about the principles established by the Spirit concerning this topic. We must constantly *"examine [ourselves] as to whether [we] are in the faith"* (2 Corinthians 13:5). If we are not in the faith, we must take every step necessary to once again be found in God's good favor.

teacher is anyone who teaches false doctrine.

How do we determine whether one is a false teacher, thus, whether we are to have fellowship with him? If God requires us to make such a determination, and He does, there must be an objective test. John required his readers to perform such a test. He said, *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world"* (1 John 4:1-3). The doctrine espoused by those John was referring to was that Jesus Christ does not come in the flesh. However, the Scriptures teach that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh. So then, how would one determine whether another is a false prophet, or false teacher? Place their teaching alongside the truth. If there is a contradiction, they are false teachers because they teach that which is false, or contrary to the doctrine of Christ. John's test he would have his readers to administer is purely doctrinal.

Likewise, Paul instructed the Galatians, *"but even if we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel to you than what we have preached to you, let him be accursed"* (Galatians 1:8). Who can say the test concerned the moral character of the teacher? Paul included himself! Elsewhere, he said that in the preaching of the word he did not use *"flattering words...nor a cloak for covetousness,"* (1 Thessalonians 2:5). Rather, he was *"gentle"* (v. 7), and *"devoutly and justly and blamelessly [he] behaved [himself]"* (v. 10). It is not reasonable to suggest he approached the Galatians any differently, nor would he in the future. Yet, the test remained the same – if he taught differently than the gospel of Christ, such was false doctrine, and he would be a false teacher. He would be accursed, regardless of his approach and motive in teaching the doctrine!

Jesus also required those to whom He spoke to administer such a test. He said,

doctrine they espouse is true, even if it stands in contradiction with the plain teaching of scripture, and have pure intentions in teaching that doctrine, that such are not “false teachers.” This idea of “false teachers” is contradictory to that of Scripture, and leaves us no objective standard to judge by. Any label of “false teacher” placed upon an individual is conceived purely from subjective reasoning. Scripture teaches otherwise.

Peter wrote, *“But there were also false prophets among the people, even as there will be false teachers among you, who will secretly bring in destructive heresies, even denying the Lord who bought them, and bring on themselves swift destruction”* (2 Peter 2:1). Why does Peter call these people “false teachers?” It is because they brought *“destructive heresies.”* It is not because of their depraved character which Peter goes on to describe. It is not even because of the way in which they brought in the destructive heresies – *“secretly.”* Certainly, these things are wrong. However, these are only descriptions of the specific false teachers which Peter refers to, not ALL who are false teachers.

Peter likened the *“false teachers”* of his day to those in the past who were *“false prophets.”* This train of thought proceeded from the end of chapter one where Peter discussed the origin of scripture. *“No prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation, for prophecy never came by the will of man, but holy men of God spoke as they were moved by the Holy Spirit”* (1:20-21). *“Private interpretation”* is the translation of the Greek, *idios epilysis*. *Idios*, meaning “pertaining to one’s self, one’s own” (Thayer). *Epilysis*, meaning “a loosening, unloosing” (Thayer). Literally, *idios epilysis* means, “one’s own loosening, or unloosing.” When a word is spoken, it is loosed from one’s mouth. This is the idea in Peter’s writing. Scripture does not come from one’s own loosening, but from God’s loosening. *“But there were also false prophets among the people”* (2:1) – i.e. those who prophesy falsely, or whose prophecy is loosed not from God, but from themselves. *“Even as there will be false teachers among you”* – i.e. those who teach falsely, or whose teachings are loosed not from God, but from themselves. A false

Fellowship Between Men

Fellowship with God and man is contingent upon one thing. It is that which inheres in the term “fellowship.” *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth”* (1 John 1:5b-6). Is there commonality between God and the man in spiritual matters? Does his belief, practice, and character adhere to all things revealed by God to be “light?” It matters not if a fellow says he has fellowship with God if indeed he does not. Is he in the light as God is in the light? Then he has fellowship with God. Is he walking in darkness? Then he does not have fellowship with God. Just as truth is objective, and cannot be changed by simple emotion, so it is with fellowship. The only way a man can change his standing with God is to come to Him on His divinely inspired terms (cf. 1 John 1:1-4).

These principles are imperative if we wish to understand the principles of fellowship between men. Spiritual fellowship between men is objective. Based on the truth of 1 John 1, if two men have fellowship with God, the two men have fellowship with each other. If only one of the two has fellowship with God – the other being in darkness – then the two do not have fellowship with each other. They might unlawfully participate with each other in some areas (cf. 2 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1; etc.), but it does not change the fact of the missing link – common fellowship with God. If anything, such unlawful participation will change the relationship of the one who has fellowship with God to the contrary, *“for he who greets him [who does not have God] shares in his evil deeds”* (2 John 11). However, it will not change the relationship of the one who does not have fellowship with God, for he continues to be in darkness. From this we reach the understanding of the two sides of fellowship between men. There is the objective truth of either common fellowship with God, or lack thereof. Then there are the subsequent actions, either lawfully or otherwise, in which men participate. It is vital we understand that if the objective side of fellowship between men – both have fel-

lowship with God – is missing, the only result which can come from unlawful participation (fellowship) with each other is another severance of fellowship with God.

The issues which surround the topic of fellowship between men ultimately concern the subsequent actions taken by men when the truth of their fellowship, or lack of fellowship with God is reached. God has made it simple: If one has fellowship with God, he has fellowship with anyone else who has that same relationship with God. Subsequently, they can participate together (cf. Acts 2:40-47). If one has fellowship with God, he does not have fellowship with any other who does not have that same relationship with God. Therefore, they cannot participate together (cf. 2 John 9-11). However, some refuse to adhere to this simple precept.

There are tests which can be used – which **MUST** be used – to answer the simple query, “can I have fellowship with this man?” *“Test the spirits, whether they are of God”* (1 John 4:1). It is the same principle of examining ourselves to see whether we are in the faith (cf. 2 Corinthians 13:5). It is simply examining another’s situation – to the extent of which we are able – to see whether they are *“in the faith.”* If they are, they have fellowship with God, they have fellowship with you, and there can be joint participation. If they are not, they do not have fellowship with God, they do not have fellowship with you, and there cannot be joint participation.

Some have illustrated the principle with the figure of a triangle. The top point is God, and the bottom points are men. The sides which connect the three points are the common relationship which brings the two together in fellowship. When both bottom points (men) are connected to the top point (God), then the bottom points (men) are connected with each other (fellowship between men). If one of the bottom points (men) is not connected with the top point (God), then the bottom points (men) are not connected with each other. Thus, if the one who has fellowship with God administers the test of whether the other has fellowship with God (cf. 1 John 1:5-6), and finds he does not, then the one in fellowship with God does

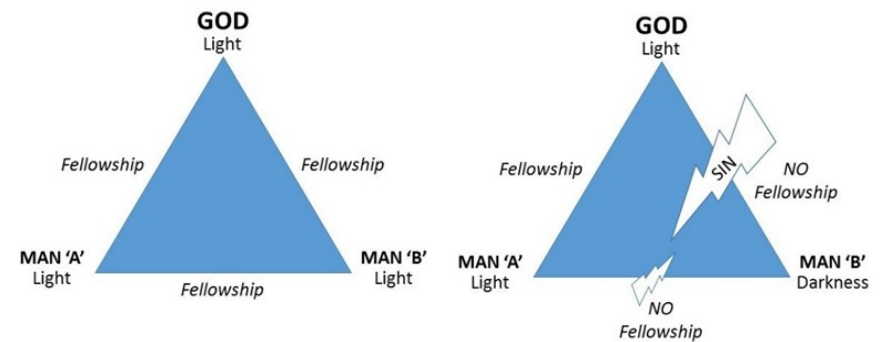
False Teachers and Honesty

To be pleasing to God one must bear fruit in His name. *“Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away”* (John 15:2). In order to bear fruit, we must abide in Jesus who identifies Himself as *“the true vine”* (v. 1). *“Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me”* (v. 4). What does it mean for Jesus to abide in us, and for us to abide in Him? Jesus adds, *“If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you...By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples”* (vv. 7-8). This is consistent with what Jesus said earlier in His ministry – *“If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free”* (John 8:31-32). We cannot be God’s children, thus please God, if we do not bear fruit. We cannot bear fruit unless we abide in *“the true vine.”* Jesus is that vine, and we cannot abide in Him unless His words abide in us. It is imperative that the words of Christ, or His doctrine, abides in us. Without such there is no liberation from the shackles of sin, and no identification with the Father and the Son. For this reason, the scripture gives ample warning against false teachers. Their doctrine is false if it is not the words of Christ. Their doctrine does not produce the fruits of God which bring Him glory. One must not heed his words, nor receive him (cf. 2 John 9-11).

As simple as it may seem (and it is) to understand the reason for warnings against false teachers in Scripture, and to understand who is a false teacher, there are some even in the church who complicate such beyond any objective reasoning. The term “false teacher,” for them, does not simply describe one who teaches falsely. Rather, it describes a person whose character is false, and whose motives in teaching are malevolent. It is not one whose teaching simply contradicts the words of Christ, but one who dishonestly promotes those contradicting words to intentionally lead others astray, and malign Christ and God. The implication of such reasoning is that those who are honestly convicted that the

and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty” (2 Corinthians 6:16b-18).

not have fellowship with the other (cf. 1 John 1:3). Subsequently, they cannot lawfully participate together (cf. 2 John 9-11).



The joint participation between men which subsequently follows the test of fellowship involves two areas. There is the joint participation in spiritual matters, and in secular matters. When considering such joint participation between brethren (cf. 1 Corinthians 5:9-13), the allowance of both is contingent upon the relationship each has with God. The question of spiritual and secular matters of joint participation between two named “brethren” fall under the two possible conclusions reached from the test of fellowship. If both have fellowship with God, there is the OBLIGATION TO jointly participate. If one of the two does not have fellowship with God, there is the OBLIGATION TO ABSTAIN from joint participation.

When the church was established on Pentecost in Acts 2, *“those who gladly received [Peter’s] word were baptized; and that day about three thousand souls were added to them”* (v. 41). *“Them”* are those who comprised the church (v. 47), i.e., those who were saved, and as such, had fellowship with God. Because of their common fellowship with God, the Holy Spirit revealed that *“they continued steadfastly in the apostles’ doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers...Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need”* (v. 42, 44-45). They all had fellowship with God, and the inspired implication

is that, subsequently, they were not only permitted, but required to jointly participate in these spiritual matters. They worshiped together – studied and heard the word of God preached, took the Lord’s Supper, prayed together, shared with each other financially as anyone had need, and sang songs of praise (cf. Ephesians 5:19; Colossians 3:16). They were also a people who, because of their most important relationship together (spiritual), jointly participated in secular matters – *“breaking bread from house to house, they ate their food with gladness and simplicity of heart”* (v. 46).

Conversely, one of the several *problems* addressed by Paul in his first letter to the Corinthian church was an issue of fellowship. He wrote, *“It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you...that a man has his father’s wife”* (5:1)! As one who was involved in the darkness of sexual immorality, he did not have fellowship with God. Ergo, he did not have fellowship with the Corinthian church. However, they disregarded the principles of fellowship with their subsequent actions as they continued to participate with him in worship. Paul instructed, *“deliver such a one to Satan for the destruction of the flesh”* (v. 5). He may have continued to attend worship, and they may have continued to allow him, but he did not dwell in Christ’s kingdom, rather Satan’s kingdom, *“the power of darkness”* (Colossians 1:13). They were not to continue worshiping with him. Furthermore, Paul gave instruction concerning their abstinence of joint participation with such a one in secular matters – *“But now I have written to you not to keep company with anyone named a brother, who is sexually immoral, or covetous, or an idolater, or a reviler, or a drunkard, or an extortioner – not even to eat with such a person”* (v. 11; emphasis mine, JC).

These principles of fellowship between men are as easy to understand as the principles of fellowship between God and man. For, they are related. However, issues still arise as men disregard the simplicity of scripture.

but was dwelling in the *“power of darkness”* (Colossians 1:13), to participate with them in the activities of the kingdom of God was helping neither the sinner, or the church. Paul commanded, *“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”* (v. 5). Their tolerance of the sinner might have led him to believe his soul was safe. However, he was a servant of sin in the kingdom of Satan, and to impress upon him such a truth, they were to deliver him to his actual abode. This, not reception in spite of sin, would work toward the saving of his soul.

In addition to their reception of the one in sexual immorality contributing to the loss of his soul, it was endangering the church. Paul wrote, *“Your glorying is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump”* (v. 6)? We are naïve to think we are above the leavening properties of sin and error. The tolerance of sin by the church gives the implication that sin is not dangerous. More, then, are made further susceptible to sin’s lure, and grasp. *“Do not be deceived: ‘Evil company corrupts good habits’”* (15:33). The effects of one man’s sin are far reaching. Paul commanded, *“Therefore purge out the old leaven, that you may be a new lump, since you truly are unleavened. For indeed Christ, our Passover, was sacrificed for us. Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, nor with the leaven of malice and wickedness, but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth”* (vv. 7-8). Furthermore, when Paul wrote his second letter to Corinth, he explained, *“For to this end I also wrote, that I might put you to the test, whether you are obedient in all things”* (2 Corinthians 2:9). To tolerate sin in the church, and receive those whom God has not received, is to rebel against His divine command.

Ultimately, God requires the bride of Christ to be holy. Daily, we are to set ourselves apart from sin, and be consecrated to God. We cannot achieve such holiness while receiving those God has not received. *“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.’ Therefore ‘Come out from among them*

according to His commandments," namely, "that we love one another" (vv. 5, 6). Thus, the warning about the "many deceivers" (v. 7). They are false teachers. They teach that which is contrary to the "truth." Ultimately, the foundation of their doctrine rested on the false premise that Jesus Christ had not come in the flesh (v. 7). Such was the specific contradiction to the general "doctrine of Christ" which is the entire truth. The problem was not merely a contradiction to the doctrine *about* who Christ was, but a contradiction to the "doctrine of Christ" – that which He taught (cf. John 14:8-11; Luke 24:36-43). The same is understood concerning the doctrine of the Pharisees (cf. Matthew 16:12), of Balaam (cf. Revelation 2:14), and of the Nicolaitans (cf. Revelation 2:15). Such concerned their teaching.

The reception of one who does not "abide in the doctrine of Christ" followed by the claim to reject their teaching is self-contradictory. Words without the agreeing actions are empty. One who is truly opposed to sin and error in word and heart will be opposed to sin and error in action. To receive such a one is to "share in his evil deeds."

We must recognize additional implications of receiving such a one who returns to the filth of sin, and is separated from God. Such does not accomplish the restoration of a soul. Rather, it shows acceptance of, or at best indifference toward their life of rebellion against God. It bids them success on their journey toward eternal damnation. It fails to recognize their current spiritual state, and therefore fails to act in a fitting manner.

One of the many failures of the Corinthian church which Paul addressed was their tolerance of sin. There was a man involved in sexual immorality, "and such sexual immorality as is not even named among the Gentiles – that a man has his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1). These brethren were "puffed up" to the extent of failing to see the sorrow of the situation (v. 2). They did not mourn over a soul lost to the wiles of the devil. They put up with the evil, and did not seek to repair the wounds of the evil doer. Allowing one who was no longer recognized by God,

Receive Him

The scriptural principles regarding fellowship are as clear as any other subject. However, clarity of scripture does not change the fact of hardened hearts. Some receive others into fellowship when they have no authority to do so, and some refuse to receive others into fellowship when they have the obligation to do so. Both actions disregard instruction from the Holy Script, and must be addressed.

"Since you have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit in sincere love of the brethren, love one another fervently with a pure heart" (1 Peter 1:22). A natural result of obeying the truth and being redeemed by the blood of the Lamb is the loving of those who have experienced the same. When one obeys the truth, he enters a fraternity of faith, hope, and love. All have the same faith produced by the same object of faith. All have the same hope of heaven. All have experienced the same love from God, and have reciprocated that love in faithful obedience. The sharing of such an intimate relationship between creature and Creator not only brings the natural result of love between brethren, but demands it – *"Beloved, if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another"* (1 John 4:11).

The principle of fellowship that is receiving him whom God receives rests on the fundamental requisite of love for the brethren. If we truly love God, then we will love those who have been born of Him – those who bear His image (cf. Romans 8:29; Colossians 3:10) – *"for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen"* (1 John 4:20b)? With this same logic, John wrote, *"But whoever has this world's goods, and sees his brother in need, and shuts up his heart from him, how does the love of God abide in him"* (1 John 3:17)? The receiving of those whom God has received shows the inward abiding love of God.

It is with this fundamental principle that John concluded a man named Diotrephes did not abide in God's love – *"He who does good is of God, but he who*

does evil has not seen God" (3 John 11b). The evil committed by Diotrephes included the failure to receive those whom God had received. His love for *"the preeminence among [the church]"* (v. 11) led him to *"not receive [John and 'the brethren']"*, as if his *"prating against [them] with malicious words"* was not enough. His love for self precluded him from fulfilling the command to love his brethren. Furthermore, whatever position he held in that congregation, he used in a domineering way to keep others from fulfilling their duties of love – *"and forbids those who wish to [receive the brethren], putting them out of the church"* (v. 10). This behavior is set in stark contrast to that of Gaius – *"Beloved [Gaius], you do faithfully whatever you do for the brethren and for strangers, who have borne witness of your love before the church. If you send them forward on their journey in a manner worthy of God, you will do well"* (vv. 5-6). To this end, John instructed the brethren, *"Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good"* (v. 11a). It is good – acceptable and pleasing to God – to receive those whom God receives. It is evil – unacceptable and displeasing to God – to refuse reception of those whom God receives.

The importance of receiving those whom God has received also led Paul to write on this subject in Romans 14. To say the misinterpretation of Romans 14 has been the seat of much controversy would be an understatement. Men have abused the context of this chapter in the Bible to justify the reception of those who are false teachers, as well as those who are involved in other sinful activities. The Devil has used this chapter as a "Trojan horse," smuggling sin into the church behind a façade of supreme love. The use of this chapter to condone sin, and fellowship the sinful not only destroys the immediate context and application, but contradicts the remote context of scripture concerning the principle of not receiving those who are not received by God (cf. 2 John 9-11; 1 Corinthians 5; 2 Corinthians 6:11-7:1; etc.).

The surrounding context of Romans 14 is helpful in properly interpreting the chapter, and understanding its purpose and application. As noted before, this

then unworthy to be received by those whom God has received.

John utilized this test of fellowship himself, and commanded from apostolic authority that his readers do the same. *"Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits, whether they are of God; because many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit that does not confess that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is not of God. And this is the spirit of the Antichrist, which you have heard was coming, and is now already in the world"* (1 John 4:1-3). The *"mystery of godliness,"* that is the gospel of Christ, included this truth, that *"God was manifested in the flesh"* (1 Timothy 3:16). To teach and believe otherwise would be to sever your fellowship with God. Furthermore, to receive one who taught and believed such a doctrine would be to align yourself with his beliefs, thus, to separate yourself from God – *"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. If anyone comes to you and does not bring this doctrine, do not receive him into your house nor greet him; for he who greets him shares in his evil deeds"* (2 John 9-11).

Those who argue that *"the doctrine of Christ"* is limited by John to the truth of Jesus' manifestation in the flesh would do well to consider the entire context. The first six verses of 2 John commend the reader's walk in truth, and commands that they continue to do so. The second half of the epistle forbids fellowship with a specific doctrine, and the teachers of it, which is contrary to the truth. The love expressed from John to *"the elect lady and her children"* was *"in truth...because of the truth"* (vv. 1-2). The love was confined to the borders of God's revelation, and existed due to the very commonality in that truth. Furthermore, the *"grace, mercy, and peace...from God the Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ"* were only extended to them *"in truth and love."* For this reason, John *"rejoiced greatly"* to find them *"walking in the truth"* (v. 4). Because the blessings of God, and fellowship with Him are only enjoyed in the truth, John pleaded with them to *"walk*

Do Not Receive Him

Receiving one whom God has received aligns us with God Himself – *“By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another”* (John 13:35). It is the mark of true discipleship, and is manifest evidence of a fuller understanding of Christ’s redemptive work (cf. 1 John 3:16-17). For this reason, it is a travesty when some operate under the label of love to receive those whom God has not received. Such is contrary to the very premise of Jesus’ expression of love in His death on the cross. He did not die to receive men in their sins, but that through His death their sins might be forgiven (cf. Romans 7:24-25a), and through the power of His resurrection they might die to sin once for all (cf. Ephesians 1:19-20). It is in this way that Jesus provided an opportunity for eternal fellowship with Him and the Father in heaven (cf. John 14:1-6). When one receives another who is in sin, thus has not been received by God, he undermines the very reason for which Christ died. He does not make himself like Christ, but raises himself up against Him.

The litmus test of fellowship is the divine revelation of truth. Jesus said, *“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me”* (John 14:6). He later prayed to the Father that His disciples would be sanctified by the word of truth (cf. John 17:17). The word of God, the truth, sets one apart from the sinful world, the power of darkness, and consecrates him to the service of God in the kingdom (cf. Colossians 1:13). This is contingent upon the obedience of man to the truth – *“You have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit...having been born again, not of corruptible seed but incorruptible, through the word of God which lives and abides forever”* (1 Peter 1:22, 23). Obedience to the gospel, initially and subsequently, is that which separates man from sin, and brings him into the fellowship of his Creator and Savior. Thus, if a man ceases to submit in obedience to the gospel message, that man separates himself from God, and returns to the world of sin (cf. 2 Peter 2:18-22). He is

principle of receiving one whom God has received rests on the fundamental principle of love for the brethren. Chapter 13:8-9 discussed the imperative of loving one another – *“Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore love is the fulfillment of the law”* (13:10). The chapter following the fourteenth serves as the conclusion of the principles established therein, which is an application of the principle of loving one another – *“We then who are strong ought to bear with the scruples of the weak, and not to please ourselves. Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, leading to edification”* (15:1-2). Jesus is then used as the prime example of such (15:3). Anything contrary to that which Christ did, or would have done Himself cannot be included in Romans 14. Christ never tolerated sin, or fellowshiped sin. Romans 14 does not include sin. Rather, this chapter is an application of the love Christians are to have for one another. It is an application of that which Paul urged the Ephesians to do – *“[endeavor] to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace”* (Ephesians 4:3). If possible, Christians are to live peaceably together, preserving unity (cf. Romans 12:18). Romans 14 discusses a matter which arose in the church in Rome where unity and fellowship were being destroyed contrary to the will of God.

“Receive one who is weak in the faith, but not to disputes over doubtful things” (v. 1). The fundamental principles of fellowship established thus far in this work limit the reception of the *“weak”* individual to one who is already received by God. However, one only needs to look to the third verse of the text to know that such is the case. Why MUST the one *“weak in the faith”* be received? – *“for God has received him.”* Those whom God has received must receive those whom God has received or they rebel against God.

Let us not be fooled into thinking one who is in sin is received by God – *“God is light and in Him is no darkness at all”* (1 John 1:5b). This one who is to be received because he is already received by God is not weak in the sense of sinful character. His weakness concerns his perception of *“doubtful things.”* These doubtful things concern *“eating”* and *“not eating,”* and *“observing the day”* and *“not ob-*

does not know God, for God is love" (1 John 4:7-8).

serving the day." Both positive and negative actions regarding these subjects are matters where God receives the person, and *"is able to make him stand"* (v. 4b). They are matters which fit the context of *"nothing [being] unclean of itself"* (v. 14b). Therefore, these are matters of indifference to God – *"He who observes the day, observes it to the Lord; and he who does not observe the day, to the Lord he does not observe it. He who eats, eats to the Lord, for he gives God thanks; and he who does not eat, to the Lord he does not eat, and gives God thanks"* (v. 6). The only requirement of God is that *"each be fully convinced in his own mind"* (v. 5b). *"But he who doubts is condemned if he eats, because he does not eat from faith; for whatever is not from faith is sin"* (v. 23). The one who is *"weak in the faith"* is such due to his lack of knowledge concerning the approval of God for "eating" and "not observing." Because he does not have faith to eat, or not observe a day, he is not able to do either, for it would defile his conscience.

The one who can eat, or not observe a day because he does not doubt, but can do so *"from faith,"* must receive the *"weak"* brother. Instead of despising him for his lack of knowledge, he must *"bear with the scruples of the weak"* (15:1). The *"weak"* brother is received by God, and MUST be received by the *"strong"* brother.

The one who cannot eat, or is compelled to observe a day because of his doubt, must receive the *"strong"* brother without judgment – *"Who are you to judge another's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for God is able to make him stand"* (v. 4). The *"strong"* brother is received by God, and MUST be received by the *"weak"* brother.

It is our duty as Christians to love those of like precious faith. This requires humility, and selflessness. When one is received by God we have the obligation to receive that one as well. When we judge, or despise another who is received by God, or refuse the reception of him for personal gain like Diotrephes, or any other reason, we sin against God. *"Beloved, let us love one another, for love is of God; and everyone who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love*