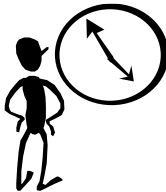


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study 4:00 p.m.

Worship 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday:

Bible Study 7:00 p. m.

Why All the Fuss About Grace-Fellowship?

By Aubrey Belue, Jr.
via Gospel Guardian, August 15, 1974

In recent months, much writing --"pro" and "con" (but mostly "con") -- has been done on the "grace-fellowship" issue. Due to the misdirection and "side issues" that now obscure the scene, wisdom requires us to seek a clear definition of matters as they currently stand.

We have seen the issue initiated in the various writings and other forms of teaching by those whose doctrinal positions have been questioned. In reaction, criticism has been given, clarification has been sought, and opposition has been raised to these writings and teachings. As is usual, cries of "foul play," "misunderstanding," "un-Christian motives," etc., have flourished -- both "pro" and "con." Some of the principals in the controversy have sought to disclaim involvement, and, after helping to raise the issues, permit no close examination of their ideas. Others, in their frustration, have seemed bitter and overly personal in their efforts to gain "full disclosure" and bring about an open study. Still, others have sought to minimize the differences, and have attempted to act as buffers on behalf of those under attack.

These are typical by-products of such situations, and ought not to be surprising (this is not to say that those who have been wrong in their action -- or lack of action -- are to be excused. All are responsible for their conduct, and for the impression it leaves upon others ([I Corinthians 11:19](#)). Unfortunately, and just as typically, these byproducts tend to bog us down, and the substance of the controversy becomes obscured. So, as at the beginning of our article: "Why all the fuss?"

First, there are substantive differences -- at least inso-

far as words and actions can convey ideas. In fairness, it is proper to say that some have denied the natural import of their words and plead a "misunderstanding," though they have not specifically located such a "misunderstanding." Still, both the words and actions of some among us show real differences.

On determining fellowship, there are wide differences. The following quotes are highly significant:

". . . although inferences and deductions from scripture premises, when fairly inferred may be truly called the doctrine of God's holy word, yet are they not binding (formally) upon the conscience of Christians further than they can perceive the connection, and evidently see that they are so, for their faith must not stand in the wisdom of men but in the power and veracity of God. Therefore, no such deductions can be made terms of communion (fellowship), but do properly belong to the after and progressive edification of the church Here is clearly stated a definition of faith' and 'opinion' that is workable in any age. It would be very difficult to overemphasize the importance of these two sentences from Thomas Campbell." ["Faith or Opinion," *Gospel Guardian Reprints*].

In a clear explanation of the scope of this principle, the article begins with this statement:

"Whether the subject be mechanical - instrumental music in worship, the number of containers in the Lord's supper, congregational support of various organizations, centralized programs of intra-church activity, or any of many other controversies, one 'side' is usually found justifying what the other 'side' calls a 'departure from the pattern' by classifying the disputed practice as a matter of 'opinion' [Ibid.].

Needless to say, when one compares instrumental music with individual communion cups in regards to fellowship, the teaching of both that "these are not to be made terms of communion (fellowship)," he does not reflect the past and present thinking of the great bulk of those whose doctrinal togetherness has marked them "conservative" amid the conflicting "churches of Christ." Right or wrong, the difference is there!

Such statements explain the charge that the "grace-fellowship" line is designed to offer a basis for an "overall sharing" with our "institutional" and "instrumental music" brethren (so long as one does not commit these errors himself). And, though this particular quotation has been explained as the thoughts of Campbell rather than the article's author, his declaration enlightens us as to his attitude in the matter!

Back of this approach to fellowship lie two doctrinal pillars:

- a "permissive" concept of grace; and
- a "grading" of sin.

This concept of grace allows wide latitude for persistent sin in the life of a sincere child so long as he remains ignorant that it is sin:

". . . The man 'in Christ' is saved by God's grace, not his own wisdom. He is righteous, not because he is 'right' on every issue, but because he is right about Jesus Christ and seeks to obey Him . . ." ["Truth, Error, and the Grace of God," *Gospel Guardian Reprints*].

And discussing the attitude toward these sins in which the unknowing Christian should receive "overall" approval (though specific condemnation of the wrong practice), these thoughts are given in the aforementioned article on "Faith or Opinion":

". . . Obligation, then is on the one wanting brethren to do or believe, and he must show cause for their doing or believing . . . unless the thing is a matter of 'faith' and salvation, an objector has only to protest- in good conscience, and . . . the advocate (must) convince the objector of the rightfulness of the thing, or else cease his demands that it be done or believed. But this does not give the objector the right to forbid the other brother's doing or believing."

The reason the "grace-fellowship" line provides for continuing toleration and overall approval of these erring brethren can be found in "fundamental" and "growth" distinctions that are made in Bible teaching. One author ["Answers To Questions," *Gospel Guardian*, May 16, 1974] sees a difference in the essentiality of "the fundamental message that is required to become and remain a child of God," and "the rest of the healthy teaching that one grows in the rest of his life." This same author says:

"We should learn to make a Biblical distinction between teaching necessary for salvation in the first place and teaching designed to aid our growth in Christ. Otherwise, we will be condemning each other for spiritual immaturity or unwilling ignorance-a thing never done by 'dew Testament writers . . ." ["Truth, Error, and the Grace of God," *Gospel Guardian Reprints*].

I am well aware of the dangers inherent in reviewing that which others are said to teach, and I -- along with many others -- welcome indications that these are not the teachings of our brethren. For those who are interested in clarifying such matters as might be deemed "misunderstandings" in the above, we will offer a number of observations prompted by such things as we have seen taught.

It is one thing for a teacher to answer his own questions, with no avenue for a direct challenge to his teaching and quite another for one to submit himself to the critical, probing questions that those who doubt his teaching might legitimately raise!

Also, these differences must materially distort the truth --and this is really why so much has been said! I offer the following points at which the "grace-fellowship" line is at odds with Scriptural truth:

1. It largely ignores what the Old Testament says about grace and obedience. One gets the idea that the Old Testament is all law, and the New is all grace. (And this is not specifically taught. In fact, care is taken to affirm that there is "grace" in the Old Testament -- the only trouble is, these teachers admit it and then they forget

it!) God's grace then provided a sacrificial system to give the sinner access to God -- but grace then required that one meet the demands of the system! When people then did not do the will of God in whatever He said (committing adultery, worshipping idols, but also offering strange fire, touching the ark, violating the Sabbath) they suffered the penalty of the law! These are the very things God uses to illustrate His reaction to our actions now ([Romans 15:4](#); [I Corinthians 10:1-13](#)). These teachers today make the distinction between Old and New, one which changes God's approach to such things.

2. It seeks to categorize "sins" -- teaching that some are so "basic" that they condemn themselves, while others are overlooked by God if the "heart is right."

3. It shifts the basic determination of fellowship between children of God from propositions to dispositions. Instead of accepting John's definition of the child of the devil as one who does not do righteousness; they define him as one who does not want to do righteousness ([I John 3:10](#)). It is now, among Christians, almost altogether a matter of attitude -- so they say.

4. So, it requires men to exercise judgment of "hearts" instead of "deeds" in order to determine those with whom we will "have fellowship."

5. It requires God to have two approaches to "grace" even in this dispensation. His "grace" to the alien sinner requires obedience to exact commands (one must be baptized!), but His "grace" to the Christian does not. And this despite the fact that most of the passages upon which they rely for an understanding of "grace" are passages which, if not wholly considering the "grace" that makes Christians (and thus requires obedience to exact commands), are at least those which include it! From these passages, which they admit do not exclude "obedience to commands" for the alien, they profess to learn that "observing law" is not essential to salvation for the Christian!

6. It considerably distorts the Bible definition of faith, minimizing the extent to which acceptable faith includes doing the divine will, not merely suggest an attitude that produces that doing!

7. It results in a need for two dictionaries -- one for its advocates, another for the rest of us! Hardly any of the words which are vital to an understanding of these issues are used identically by those who differ on these matters.

8. It leaves grave implications concerning the clarity and simplicity of God's word. The impression is generally left that one must seek in vain to know all that God requires of him because we will be ignorant (in all probability) of some requirements even when we die!

9. It raises hypothetical questions comparable to the one the sectarians used to ask. "Suppose a man repented, and sought baptism, and was killed in a car wreck on the way to the baptistry?" Now, it is, "Suppose a man (a gospel preacher) is driv-

ing down the road, inadvertently and ignorantly goes over 55 miles an hour, and is immediately killed in a car wreck?" Well, why not go one better and put them in the same car? According to the present development, the preacher will be saved, and the baptismal candidate will be lost! And, the truth is, all we can tell either is what the word of God says to the alien, that "he that . . . is baptized shall be saved;" to the erring sinner that God's pardon to him is extended upon penitence, confession, and prayer. To whatever extent God in His mercy may temper the strictness of the law has not been entrusted to me! As Brother Foy Wallace, Jr., often has said, "Clemency belongs to the judge; it is our duty to preach the law."

This article reflects the conclusions to which an extensive exposure to these matters has led me over many months of study. I would be happy to know of specific matters that would indicate I am mistaken in my understanding of the issue. But, brethren, if the summary of the position is valid, these nine points of objection must also be considered valid (or so I believe). And if these objections are valid, it becomes increasingly more difficult to understand how one might willingly shield the advocates of such. Surely men who are determined to continue in these views are responsible to both God and their hearers. Let them stand on their own work, and allow us a fair and frank basis upon which to know their teaching and its fruits!

Keeping Our Dignity

By Bruce Reeves

Preparing for a sermon I came across this passage as Paul wrote to Timothy and thought I would share:

"Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a worker who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth. Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly. Their teaching will spread like gangrene. Among them are Hymenaeus and Philetus, who have departed from the truth. They say that the resurrection has already taken place, and they destroy the faith of some. Nevertheless, God's solid foundation stands firm ... Don't have anything to do with foolish and ignorant arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged" (II Timothy 2:15-19, 23).

As one serves the Lord and teaches the truth there is certainly a time to forthrightly reprove and rebuke that which is sinful and false, but we must not ever lose our dignity, integrity, and character in Christ in the process.

