



The Gospel Guardian

Entered as second class matter March 31, 1947, at Lufkin, Texas under the act of Congress, March 3, 1879. Published weekly, except the first week in July and the last week of December, at the office of the Gospel Guardian Co., 1422 North Timberland Drive, Lufkin, Texas. Owner and Publisher, Wm. E. Wallace, Editor, Fanning Yater Tant.

RATES
\$5.00 per year in advance

(Churches sending the Gospel Guardian to every family earn the special \$3.00 per family rate, payable monthly)

Editorial

FELLOWSHIP

LUTHER G. ROBERTS

(Editor's note: Since "fellowship" seems to be the question of the hour, we are happy to present the following thought-provoking editorial by Brother Luther G. Roberts. We also begin in this issue a series of three articles by Brother Forrest D. Moyer on "Factionalism." We have a number of excellent articles in the office dealing with the general theme of fellowship; we will publish a representative number of them in future issues.)

Fellowship is a much discussed and a much misunderstood subject from what is said and done as "fellowship" in our day. Many do not know the meaning of the term "fellowship" as it is used in the New Testament. Although they word

"fellowship" is defined and used to describe association, eating and drinking together and even joint participation in worldly enterprises, this is not the meaning of the words translated "fellowship," "contribution," "communication," etc., in the New Testament. To many "fellowship" has come to mean getting together for recreational or entertainment purposes, social activities, eating a common meal or drinking coffee and eating donuts. While these things are not wrong, or may not be wrong, and may even be good, the word translated "fellowship" in the New Testament means something different from these activities.

The Greek word KOINONIA means "(a) communion, fellowship, sharing in common (from koinos, common), is translated 'communion' in I Cor. 10:16; Philm. 6, R.V., 'fellowship,' for A.V., 'communication;' it is most frequently translated 'fellowship;' (b) that which is the outcome of fellowship, a contribution, e.g., Rom. 15:26; 2 Cor. 8:4."

"METOCHE" in the Greek is translated "fellowship" in 2 Cor. 6:14. In the Septuagint, Ps. 122:3, 'Jerusalem is built as a city whose fellowship is complete.' The word seems to have a more restricted sense than KOINOIA."—(W. E. Vine, Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words).

If just associating with people, eating with them a common meal, is the meaning of the fellowship taught in the New Testament, then we would have fellowship with infidels, denominationalists and any others with whom we associate who are not Christians.

The English Dictionary meaning of the word "fellowship" is no more the New Testament meaning than the English Dictionary meaning of the word baptize is the meaning of the New Testament word for baptize.

KOINONIA is translated by various words in the English and these terms convey to us the

meaning that the Greek terms did to those who spoke and wrote in the Greek language. These words are used of a spiritual relationship and service by inspired men. Paul wrote to the saints at Corinth that "God is faithful, through whom ye were called into the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord" (1 Cor. 1:9). John wrote, "that which we have seen and heard declare we unto (apostles) unto you (little ones) also, that ye also may have fellowship with us (apostles); yea, and our (apostles) fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ." So, those who have "fellowship" with the apostles of Christ have fellowship with the Father and the Son. Paul refers to the fellowship of the Holy Spirit with Christians (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). He also writes to the Philippians and thanks God upon his remembrance of them for their "fellowship in furtherance of the gospel" (Phil. 1:5). He also says that these brethren did well "that ye had fellowship with my affliction" (Phil. 4:14), and goes on to say that "no church but ye only had fellowship with me in the matter of giving and receiving in the beginning of the gospel "when I departed from Macedonia" (Phil. 4:14, 16).

The partaking of the bread and the cup in the Lord's supper is having fellowship with, a participation in, or a communion with the body and the blood of Christ (1 Cor. 10:16, 17). Disciples of Christ have fellowship with the death of Christ, that is, partake of all the benefits of his death, remission of sins, sonship of God, and heirship of the promises of God in Christ, etc. The Hebrew writer admonishes, "But to do good and communicate forget not; for with such sacrifices God is well pleased" (Heb. 13:16). Communicating to the necessities of the saints was having fellowship with them, sharing ones goods to relieve the need of fellow saints.

To have fellowship with God, Christ, the Holy Spirit and the apostles of Christ we must walk in the light (1 Jno. 1:6, 7); walk in truth (2 Jno. 4). All who live according to God's word participate in the spiritual blessings in Christ. All those who

labor in the gospel jointly participate in, have fellowship, in the work of saving souls from sin and enjoy a spiritual relationship and are fellow-heirs of heavenly promises.

Fellowship may be severed. Sin separates from God (Isa. 59:1, 2). When children of God go beyond or fall short of the will of God they break fellowship with God (2 Jno. 9; Jas. 4:17). Christians are not to have fellowship with "the unfaithful works of darkness but rather even reprove them" (Eph. 5:11). The context of this scripture shows that Paul was referring to sins that are enumerated in verses 3-5.

Whom shall we fellowship? There are at least four positions that may be taken on this question. (1.) Fellowship everyone who is religious. This is the position of those who claim to believe in the Fatherhood of God, but who deny the Sonship of Jesus Christ. Men in world organizations pray to God, but ignore Jesus Christ. This makes room for the so-called great world religions, the Hindu, Moslem, Jew and Christian (?), the Unitarian, Universalist and Modernist can support this position. To the true followers of Jesus Christ this is unthinkable. (1 Jno. 2:22; 2 Cor. 6:14; Eph. 5:8-11). (2.) Fellowship all who are immersed. This position makes immersion in water, regardless of the one who is immersed—infant or adult—or the purpose of immersion the ground of fellowship. But immersion is not the only condition of fellowship with Christ and God. Immersion alone will not save from sin. This position separates the people of the world into two classes; the immersed and the unimmersed; it makes baptism the dividing line between the fellowshipped and the non-fellowshipped. What does this do to Bible truth? It does not consider the purpose of baptism; it does not take into account the prerequisites of baptism. But simply being immersed would still leave one a sinner, if he were accountable, and he would be out of Christ. For only baptism to a proper subject for the right purpose puts one into Christ. (Gal. 3:26, 27; Acts 2:38;

Mark 16:16). (3.) Fellowship all scripturally immersed. All who have believed in Jesus as Lord and Christ, and have been buried with Christ in baptism for the remission of their sins and raised to walk in newness of life, may be fellowshipped.

This could include some who hold to untruths in doctrine and erroneous practices in religion, such as the Missionary Society, instrumental music, pre-millennialism, church supported welfare organizations, institutionalism, centralized control of resources of many congregations in the treasury of one congregation, the sponsoring-church, church engaging in commercial business, and entertainment projects, subscribing to human creeds, names worship, etc. It could include some who are living immoral lives (1 Cor. 5) and who are busybodies, those walking disorderly, etc.

This position ignores the conditional nature of fellowship with Christ, God and the Holy Spirit (1 Jno. 1:5-7; Jno. 8:31, 32; Rom. 8:14, 2 Jno. 9-11). This position would mean to fellowship them whether they obey these scriptures or not. This would be advocating conditional salvation and unconditional fellowship. But if a Christian does not live a righteous life, and does not repent when he sins, he cannot be saved in heaven. But if all are to be fellowshipped regardless of what they teach or do, after obedience to the gospel, we fellowship those whom God will not save. If we extend fellowship knowingly, to liars, murderers, unbelievers, fornicators, false prophets, we are fellowshipping, jointly participating in those sins! (2 Jno. 9-11).

What does one have to do to fall from grace? Answer this question and the fellowship question is answered.

The five sins listed in 1 Cor. 10:1-10, which caused the Israelites to fall, included some of the same reasons for denying fellowship at Corinth to the fornicator (1 Cor. 5:4, 5, 13). cf. Num. 14:11, 12. (4.) Fellowship all who have obeyed the gospel from the heart and are walking in the light. (1 Jno. 1:5-7; 2:5, 6; 4:1-6).

Of course, the congregation cannot know the hearts of men, but can see and know them by their fruits (Matt. 7:19-21). If according to the standard of truth, the New Testament, disciples are not walking in the truth, they are not to be fellowshipped in their error and immorality (2 Thess. 3:6; 1 Cor. 5:5, 13; Titus 3:10, 11; Rom. 16:17b; 1 Tim. 1:18-20). These matters are to be judged by the same rule by which we judge other matters in religion—the New Testament. John, the beloved, said, “We are of God; he that knoweth God heareth us; he who is not of God heareth us not. By this we know the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.” (1 Jno. 4:6) Jesus wrote to the angel of the church in Ephesus, “I know thy works, and thy toil and patience, and that thou canst not bear evil men, and didst try them that call themselves apostles, and they are not and didst find them false.” (Rev. 2:2).

The way for you and me to be in fellowship is for you to be in fellowship with God, and for me to be in fellowship with God, and we will be in fellowship with each other, though we may never see each other on this earth. But if each of us remains in fellowship with God by “walking in the light” we will meet and know each other in eternity if not on this earth.

I hold no ill will toward any person though I might if I took notice of such things as gossip and lying but I cannot have fellowship (joint participation) with anyone who is teaching and supporting error, according to the word of Christ. “For he that giveth him greeting, partaketh in his evil works.” (2 Jno. 11).

—Freeport, Texas

ALL RELIGIOUS BOOKS IN PRINT

CAN BE ORDERED

THROUGH GOSPEL GUARDIAN CO
