

# **DECLARING WAR ON THE FELLOWSHIP OF THE LORD'S CHURCH<sup>1</sup>**

**By Dub McClish**

## **Introduction**

Satan and all of his minions outside the church have always opposed it. He did his best to prevent the Lord from establishing the church in the first place. Although he was allowed to put the Lord to death on the cross, thus employing even “the gates of Hades,” he could not prevail, and Christ built His church just as He had promised (Mat. 16:18). Since the establishment of the church, God’s faithful people in it have been a holy nation under siege by a world of allied forces consisting of atheism, humanism, paganism, hedonism, and denominationalism. Satan will not cease his opposition to the God-beloved and blood-bought church of Christ until he is finally cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, there to be forever confined (Rev. 20:10).

From time to time there have been those spiritual “fifth columnists,” traitors within the kingdom of Christ, who are guilty of spiritual high treason. While feigning loyalty to their Commander-in-Chief and the Constitution of His kingdom, all the while they are consorting with the enemy. They sometimes have great swelling words of praise for the enemy while they harshly criticize and belittle the Lord’s elect in the very presence of the foe. In the last third of the twentieth century the number of these modern-day Judases has proliferated. They are in places of immense influence as elders, preachers, publishers, editors, authors, and university administrators and professors. These ungodly and misguided brethren are attacking the church at every fundamental point of doctrine and practice, thereby attempting to change it to fit their culturally dictated agenda. Such changes, where successful, will destroy the church. Their threat is undeniably real and, as blind leaders, they have already led thousands of blind followers into the destructive pit of sin and error, which they occupy.

A principal area of attack by these “Benedict Arnolds” among us is the New Testament doctrine of fellowship. As the title of this chapter suggests, they have “declared war” on the Scriptural concept of fellowship as it pertains to the church. The assault by enemies of the Truth upon the doctrine of fellowship is understandable. If I were going to try to destroy the church I would certainly make fellowship a primary target of assault because it is so fundamental to the purity (yea, the very existence) of the church. If the Lord’s enemies (whether within or without) can destroy or even obscure the borderline between the power of darkness and the kingdom of light, they will hardly need to succeed in any other assaults. If the battle is lost on the issue of fellowship, it is lost completely.

This being so, we need to carefully study the subject so as to learn what the Bible teaches about it. Upon learning it, we must then stand unflinchingly for it.

## **Miscellaneous Facts About Fellowship**

### ***Definition and Frequency***

The English word *fellowship* is found fifteen times in the King James Version and seventeen times in the American Standard Version of the Bible. It is most frequently translated from the Greek word *koinonia* (and its cognates, *koinonos* and *sun-koinoneo*). Kittel says: "It expresses a two-sided relation....emphasis may be on either the giving or the receiving. It thus means 1. 'participation,' 2. 'impartation,' 3. 'fellowship.'"<sup>2</sup> Strong lists the following ideas conveyed by *koinonia*: partnership, participation, social intercourse, pecuniary benefaction, to communicate, communion, contribution, distribution, fellowship.<sup>3</sup> *Metochē*, a Greek synonym for *koinonia*, is translated "fellowship" once (KJV, 2 Cor. 6:14). Both *metochē* and *koinonia* are found in the passage just cited. Both the KJV and the ASV render *metochē* as "fellowship" and *koinonia* as "communion." Thus, it is clear that fellowship involves two or more persons or organizations participating, sharing, having communion, or having things in common. Of the seventeen occurrences of "fellowship" in the ASV, one is from Luke, five are from John, and the remaining eleven are from Paul.

The subject of fellowship is also discussed in numerous passages that do not contain the word itself, but that nonetheless relate to the concept of fellowship. Kindred subjects are unity, withdrawal from, and rejection of certain ones, "church discipline," "reconciliation," and others, as we will demonstrate in the development of this chapter.

### ***Persons/Congregations and Circumstances Involved***

Fellowship in the New Testament involves relationships between mankind and Deity ("vertical") and between fellow human beings ("horizontal"). Faithful children of God have fellowship with God the Father (1 John 1:3), with the Son of God (1 Cor. 1:9; 1 John 1:3), and with the Holy Spirit (2 Cor. 13:14; Phil. 2:1). One way in which we may have fellowship with Christ is by undergoing suffering on His behalf (Phil. 3:10).

Faithful children of God also have fellowship with one another. Paul described the acceptance and endorsement extended to him and Barnabas by James, Peter, and John as giving the "the right hands of fellowship" (Gal. 2:9). John wrote what he did to the brethren that they might have fellowship with him and in the same context said that he and those to whom he wrote might "have fellowship one with another" (1 John 1:3, 7). While some brethren have suggested that the Lord's day contribution may be in view in Acts 2:42, I agree with Kittel that

Luke's use of "fellowship" here is likely a reference to the "brotherly concord" that characterized those early saints in Jerusalem.<sup>4</sup>

One or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more individuals who are doing the Lord's work in some remote place. One way (certainly not the only way) in which this may be done is by financially supporting a preacher, as the church in Philippi supported Paul (Phi. 1:5; 4:15–16). Paul understood that the fruit of his labors would accrue to their account to some degree because of their support of his work. Paul instructed the Galatian congregations to "communicate" (*koinoneito*, i.e., to associate themselves with "...in the way of aid and relief")<sup>5</sup> unto their teachers (Gal. 6:6).

Further, one or more congregations may have fellowship with one or more other congregations in the Lord's work. One way (but again, not the only way) in which a congregation may have fellowship with another congregation is in financial support. Thus, when the church in Philippi sent support to Paul while he worked with the church in Corinth (2 Cor. 11:8–9), it was not only having fellowship with Paul, but also with the Corinthian Church. Likewise, when the church in Antioch sent relief to the churches (through their respective elders) in Judea, Antioch was extending "fellowship" to them in a very concrete way (Acts 11:27–30).

### ***Attaining Fellowship***

Human fellowship with God has never been and is not now universal and automatic. It is attainable only by complying with God's conditions. Man was in fellowship with God in the beginning, but he forfeited that fellowship when he sinned—God cast him out of the Garden of Eden (Gen. 3:9–24). Since then, with only the exception of the Son of God, men have sinned when they reached the "age of accountability:" "For all have sinned, and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23). That is, all human beings who have lived have sinned (aorist tense, which looks back over the behavior of mankind through all history) and all who now live also sin (present tense, men continue to sin). The further implication is that this also describes the behavior of man until time is no more. Since God cannot abide sin in His presence, man could not be restored to fellowship with Him (reconciled) on his own because he could not attain to purity and sinlessness on his own. God has always required the offering of blood on the part of those who sought forgiveness of sins, which forgiveness is necessary if sinful men would attain fellowship with God (Heb. 9:22).

Consummate and final forgiveness could not be attained through the offering of the blood of bulls and goats (Heb. 10:4). Ultimate forgiveness required the ultimate sacrifice of the blood of a perfect man. None on earth could be found (Psa. 14: 1; Rom. 3:10), so God, in His incomparable love for man, sent the Pre-existent Word to become incarnate as His Only

Begotten Son in the person of Jesus of Nazareth (John 3:16; Gal. 4:4–5). This sinless Son (Heb. 4:15), Jesus, the Christ, offered His own blood, not for His own sins, but for the sins of sinful men (Heb. 9:23–28; 10:10, 12, 14). His unblemished, unspotted blood redeems us from sin (1 Pet. 1:18–19). He made those once far off near, “preached peace,” brought reconciliation to man with God in the one body (His church, Eph. 1:22–23), and made it possible for former strangers to God to be fellow-citizens of His household (Eph. 2:13–19). He did all of this through the cross (i.e., the shedding of His blood) (v. 16).

Having paid the price that would enable man once more to attain fellowship with God, the Christ had every right to stipulate conditions on which fellowship could be attained. He did so in the Gospel, the message of good news, which declares: (1) that men can now be reconciled to God and once more enjoy His fellowship and (2) upon what conditions men can attain that blissful fellowship. Thus, the Gospel “...is the power of God unto salvation...” (Rom. 1:16). Reformers of the sixteenth century such as John Calvin and Martin Luther, reacting to erroneous Roman Catholic dogma, foisted an equally horrible aberration of God’s glorious plan for man’s redemption upon the world. Curiously, they advocated that God’s grace is unconditional and at the same time that man is saved by his faith only (obviously, faith is a condition)! Of course, if grace (thus fellowship with God) were unconditional, not even faith would be necessary and unbelievers would be saved. Salvation would be universal because God desires all men to be saved (1 Tim. 2:4; Tit. 2:11; 2 Pet. 3:9). This heresy would stand exposed were there only one *salvation if* passage in the Gospel, but there are many (Mark 16:16; Luke 13:3, 5; John 3:5; 8:24; Acts 2:38; 17:30; 22:16; Heb. 5:9; et al.). It is a shame beyond description that some who were once among us and strong for the Truth have now taken up this perverse doctrine. Calvin rather than the Christ is the source of Rubel Shelly’s infamous statement on this subject: “It is a scandalous and outrageous lie to teach that salvation arises from human activity. We do not contribute one whit to our salvation.”<sup>6</sup> Others who were once in fellowship with God have also echoed such “grace only” sentiments.

Most certainly, fellowship with God is conditional, and those conditions are set forth simply and understandably in the New Testament. Summarized, men must comply with the following conditions:

1. Hear the saving Gospel (Rom. 10:14b) and believe it (Mark 16:15–16)
2. Believe in the Christ of the Gospel (John 3:16; 8:24; 20:30–31; Rom. 1:16)
3. Repent of their sins (Luke 13:3, 5; 24:47; Acts 2:38; 17:30)
4. Confess with their mouths before others the faith they have in their hearts that the Christ is the Son of God and their Lord (Mat. 16:16; Acts 8:37 [KJV]; Rom. 10:9–10; 1 Tim. 6:12)

5. Be baptized (immersed in water) for the purpose of receiving forgiveness of their sins (Mark 16:16; John 3:5; Acts 2:38, 41; 22:16; 1 Pet. 3:20–21)

Upon obeying this mercy-filled (Tit. 3:5), grace-motivated (Tit. 2:11), Heaven-sent (1 Pet. 1:12), blood-bought (1 Pet. 2:18–19) plan of salvation, men are cleansed from their sins, not by their works of righteousness, but by the perfect blood of Christ as they obey Him. Having their sins washed away in the blood of Christ in the act of baptism (Acts 22:16), God can now receive them into His fellowship and that of His Son and the Holy Spirit.

How does the church of the Lord relate to this grand plan and to man's attainment of fellowship with God? Note that the Lord adds to the church he built (Mat. 16:18) all (and no others) who obey His plan of salvation and are thus saved (Acts 2:38, 41, 47). Thus the church is composed of those (and no others) who are in fellowship with the Godhead by having obeyed Christ's plan of salvation, being thereby cleansed by His blood. Of Christians (and no others) Paul wrote that "...the Father... delivered us out the power of darkness, and translated us into the kingdom of the Son of his love (Col. 1:12–13). *Kingdom* is another term for the church (Mat. 16:18–19, 28; Heb. 12:23, 28). Christ will deliver up safely His kingdom alone to the Father upon the Lord's return, implying its fellowship with God (1 Cor. 15:24). Christ will save only the church, His spiritual "body" (Eph. 5:23). The church of Christ is the household (family) of God (Eph. 2:19; 1 Tim. 3:15), another figure that indicates that it is in fellowship with Him. To summarize, only those who have obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation, and are thereby in the church/kingdom of Christ, are in fellowship with God. The church (and only the church) is the "depository" of those who are saved and who have thus attained to fellowship with God.

### ***Maintaining Fellowship***

Men who have once known the blessed fellowship of God and His Son may so behave as to forfeit it. Thus, not only must men **attain** fellowship with God; they must so live as to **maintain** it. John wrote it plainly: "If we say that we have fellowship with him [God] and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth" (1 John 1:6). Once more, John Calvin made an egregious error at this juncture. His doctrine of *once in God's fellowship, always in God's fellowship* (i.e., perseverance of the saints) has misled millions (if not billions) over the four centuries since his time and even now holds tens of millions in its thrall of false security. In Calvin's system, once one in fellowship with God (i.e., salvation), he can never believe, think, say, or do anything that will cause God to withdraw or cease it. As with the former heresy, so with this one, some of our brethren have been infected by it and are teaching that God has an "umbrella of grace" whereby His children are "automatically" forgiven of their sins, whether or not they confess and repent of those sins. However, the New Testament specifies various sins that will cause a child of God to

forfeit his fellowship with God and be lost eternally if not repented of (1 Cor. 6:9–11; Gal. 5:19–21; Eph. 5:5; et al.).

The horizontal dimension of fellowship (fellowship between men) is determined by and dependent upon the vertical (fellowship between man and God). In other words, when (and not until) men become children of God, they then (and only then) attain fellowship one with another as brethren. It follows that when men cease to be in fellowship with God, they also must not be retained in the fellowship of the church. It therefore comes as no surprise that numerous passages command the Lord's faithful people to cease having fellowship with certain of their brethren and for a variety of reasons:

1. Teaching false doctrine (Rom. 16:17–18; 1 Tim. 1:3; 19–20; 6:20–21; 2 John 9–11)
2. Causing ungodly division (note that not all division is ungodly) (Matt. 18:15–17; Rom. 16:17–18; Acts 20:29–31; Tit. 1:11–13; 3:10)
3. Committing various sins of immorality and ungodliness, disobedience, laziness, and rebellion (1 Cor. 5:1–9; 2 Thess. 3:6, 11, 14; Tit. 1:10)

The reason faithful brethren cannot have fellowship with those in the church who are disorderly is the same reason the church cannot have fellowship with those outside the church: Neither alien sinners nor impenitent saints are in fellowship with because of their sinful lives.

On the positive side of maintaining fellowship with God, John wrote: “But **if we walk in the light**, as he [God] is in the light, **we have fellowship one with another...**” (1 John 1:7, emp. DM). Unity with one's brethren in Christ, which is based on fellowship with God, is so precious that we are to strive diligently to maintain it (Eph. 4:3). Only if fellowship is highly valued and appreciated will its withdrawal be counted a grievous loss.

### **Two Principal Errors Relating to Fellowship**

The Lord's church has been plagued by extremes through the centuries, all of which have revolved around the two opposite approaches generally designated “anti-ism” and “liberalism.”<sup>7</sup>

#### ***Anti-ism***

“Anti-ism” is the disposition to be more strict than the law of God.<sup>8</sup> It is called “anti-ism” because those who espouse it generally occupy a negative position concerning things that God allows. This position binds matters of judgment and option as matters of Scriptural law and obligation. For example, various brethren have in the past tried to bind the **listing** of the acts of worship in Acts 2:42 as an invariable pattern for the **order** of the acts of worship. Since the “anti” characteristically forbids what God allows, he thereby makes laws where God has made none. For this reason, he is sometimes called a “legalist” in the sense that he is a “law-maker.”

To the credit of these brethren, most of them believe strongly in the verbal inspiration of the Bible and its authority. Their mistake is in making their opinions as authoritative as the Scriptures themselves. Thus, the anti brother is narrower than God in his approach to the Bible and religion and, consequently, he has been found to draw ever smaller boundaries of doctrine (e.g., some who first only opposed church support of orphan homes eventually began to legislate against a church helping a non-Christian, and finally have argued that a church could not give one penny to provide milk for a starving baby!). The narrower view of doctrine results in a narrower view of fellowship. Thus the “anti” brother commits the error of refusing fellowship to those who are in fellowship with God and with faithful brethren after the manner of evil Diotrephes (3 John 9–10).

### ***Liberalism***

“Liberalism” is a certain attitude in religion that is unwilling to be as strict and definitive as God is in His Word. It is called “liberalism” due to its misplaced “generosity” in “giving away” that which it does not possess. It refuses to bind things that God has bound. This approach treats matters of Scriptural obligation as if they were matters of mere option. Those who are liberal in this sense tend to rely on their emotions and subjective opinions to make presumptions on the grace and mercy of God rather than to adhere strictly to the law of Christ. For example, one such brother has said, “There are sincere, knowledgeable, devout Christians scattered among all the various denominations.”<sup>9</sup> This, in spite of the fact—as set forth above—that the New Testament explicitly and implicitly teaches that there is only one church which Christ built, for which He died, to which He adds those who are saved, and which He will save when He comes again (Eph. 4:4; Mat. 16:18; Acts 20:28; 2:41, 47; Eph. 5:23).

Before going further I need to distinguish between a “liberal,” in the sense that I have just defined him, and a “modernist.” While these two terms have some things in common they are not synonymous. The liberal is willing to take some liberties with the Word of God, but may still profess to maintain at least some confidence in and respect for certain fundamentals of the faith (e.g., inspiration of Scripture, virgin birth of Christ, Biblical miracles, resurrection of Christ, et al.). While the modernist is decidedly liberal in his attitude toward the Bible authority, he is far more. He is basically an infidel; he no longer holds to such fundamental precepts as just mentioned. To him Christianity is but one of many “world religions,” all of which are human in origin, and “truth” is not objective, but subjective, and therefore relative and mutable. In his view the Bible is a product of literary evolution over which he sits in judgment as merely an interesting curiosity piece.

Clear illustrations of the distinction between liberals and modernists are apparent in those brethren in the nineteenth century who insisted on imposing instrumental music and the missionary society upon the church. All of them were liberals in desiring to have these additions, which the Scriptures did (and do) not authorize. However, some of them proved themselves to be modernists as well, having come under the skeptical influence of the German rationalists of their time. When the “mere” liberals could not reform their modernist brethren, they separated from them and continue in that separation to the present. **The liberals became (and are) the Independent Christian Church and the modernists became (and are) the Disciples of Christ Christian Church.**

By these definitions one can observe that all modernists are liberals, but not all liberals are modernists, at least, not to begin with. **However, the seeds of modernism are most certainly in the liberal mind-set; as noted concerning those of the “anti” persuasion, “liberals” are usually progressive in their liberalism.** When one adopts the liberal approach to religion he has actually abandoned the authority of Scripture, and free of its restraints, usually moves farther and farther from Truth and righteousness. Just as the “anti” philosophy restricts fellowship due to its restriction on doctrine, so the “liberal” philosophy broadens fellowship due to its waiving of strict obedience to the doctrine of Christ.

### **Major Assaults on Fellowship in the Church**

#### ***Assaults of Anti-Isms***

The element of anti-ism is clearly identifiable in the Bible. The scribes and Pharisees are sometimes called “first century antis” with good reason. They ever sought to bind upon others as law their own traditions and opinions, which God had not bound (Mat. 9:11–13; 12:10–12; 15:2; et al.). Clearly, the Judaizing teachers of the early years of the church were antis in their contentions. They taught: “Except ye be circumcised after the custom of Moses, ye cannot be saved” (Acts 15:1). However, God had not bound circumcision as a religious act or a condition of covenant privilege under the new covenant (v. 24; cf. Gal. 5:1–6). Therefore, those who were binding it were troublesome and were attempting to subvert the brethren by binding this practice that God had not bound.

Even the apostle Peter was caught up in the spirit of anti-ism as demonstrated by his behavior in Antioch (Gal. 2:11–14). The Gospel was for Gentile and Jew without respect of persons by God (Acts 10:34–35), but Peter refused to eat with Gentile brethren and influenced others to do the same. He was refusing those whom God had accepted, thus binding where God had not bound. As previously indicated, Diotrephes was guilty of the same anti error (3 John 9–10). Paul warned of a coming apostasy in which men would forbid others to marry and



to eat meat (1 Tim. 4:3). Since these were things which God allowed (Heb. 13:4; 1 Tim. 4:3–4), they were making laws that God had not made. Paul labeled those teachers as hypocritical liars and their doctrines as “doctrines of demons” (vv. 1–2). They were “anti” in the truest sense.

In more modern times the spirit of “anti-ism” has demonstrated itself in varied issues. While varied in their points of attack, all of the “anti” movements make the same basic arguments and the same basic mistakes in Biblical interpretation:

1. They argue that they have found an “exclusive pattern” for their way of doing things when there is none.
2. They elevate incidental matters to the level of essential matters.

I will now briefly survey some of the assaults on the church and the subject of fellowship that have been made by “anti” brethren. By the last quarter of the nineteenth century a great amount of opposition among brethren had arisen to “Sunday Schools.” This carried over into the early part of the twentieth century and was an issue of major controversy till about 1930. Gunter College (Gunter, TX), founded in 1903, was doomed from the beginning because its board passed a resolution which labeled “Sunday Schools,” uninspired literature, and women teachers as unscriptural. It died for lack of support in 1928. To a great degree, the same brethren who opposed individual Bible classes, printed Bible literature, and women teaching others at all (even children or other women) in the church building, also attempted to forbid the church to use individual cups for the Lord’s Supper (“one-cuppers”). They eventually divided among themselves with some of them opposing classes while allowing separate cups and others opposing both classes and cups. Several public debates, articles in brotherhood journals, and sermons that exposed their fallacies saved the church from domination by these anti positions.

In the 1940s and 1950s the same sort of spirit caused some brethren to oppose “located” preachers (aka the “mutual ministry” doctrine) and colleges founded by brethren primarily to teach the Bible. Among those prominent in advocating these anti issues were W. Carl Ketcherside and Leroy Garrett (who, in the 1960s, radically changed directions and became as liberal as they had formerly been anti).

In the late 1940s some brethren began voicing their opposition to churches supporting orphan homes and to congregational cooperation in preaching the Gospel. Two of the principal advocates of these anti views were Roy E. Cogdill and Fanning Yater Tant. They strongly pushed their views, especially through the pages of *The Gospel Guardian*. Numerous debates were conducted on these issues, some of the most crucial of which were those between W.L. Totty and Charles Holt (1954), E.R. Harper and Yater Tant (1955, 1956), Guy N. Woods and W. Curtis Porter (1956), Guy N. Woods and Roy E. Cogdill (1957), and G.K. Wallace and Charles

Holt (1959). Roy C. Deaver and Thomas B. Warren also wrote, debated, and spoke extensively against this anti movement and thus helped greatly to stem the tide that seriously threatened to engulf the church.<sup>10</sup> These latter anti movements have spawned even more extreme anti positions such as opposing eating a physical meal in a church building and, as earlier mentioned, giving from the church treasury even a penny to anyone who is not a Christian (commonly referred to as the “saints only” doctrine).

The anti-Bible class, anti-Bible literature, anti-women teacher, anti-located preacher, anti-multiple cups, and anti-Bible college positions were generally recognized as extreme through the efforts of stalwart men who exposed their fallacies. They therefore captured only a relatively small percentage of congregations and had largely run their course by the 1940s. However, the anti-cooperation and anti-orphan home contention had a far more powerful effect, in spite of the valiant efforts of several good men. Many preachers aligned themselves with it and it captured at least a few hundred congregations. Florida Christian College in Tampa, Florida, came under the influence of this faction and it continues in this alignment under the name of Florida College. While these anti brethren continue to propagate their doctrine and to push their assault against the church, refusing to fellowship those who will not bow to their personal scruples, they have not made any major gains in the past thirty years. Even so, we must not relax our vigilance against those errors.

### ***Assaults of Liberalism***

The assault on the church and its fellowship with the possibility of far more disastrous consequences from the mid-1960s to the present has been and is liberalism, as previously defined. This disastrous and destructive attitude is evident in many persons described in the Bible. All of those who thought they could substitute what pleased them in place of what God specified were liberals. This includes the likes of Cain (Gen. 4), Nadab and Abihu (Lev. 10), Saul (1 Sam. 15), and David (1 Chr. 13, 15).

In more modern times, in the middle part of the nineteenth century some brethren began to insist upon using mechanical instruments of music in worship and a missionary society in evangelism. In order to do so they had to adopt a loose and liberal view toward Scriptural authority. They insisted on their right to have these things on the basis that the Scriptures did not specifically forbid them. These brethren were so determined to have their unauthorized innovations that they would stop at nothing, even a general division in the church, which was recognized in 1906 by the federal census. Those who were so wedded to the instrument and the society that they split off from the church then split into two denominations by 1926. As I earlier indicated, one of these became the **Disciples of Christ Christian Church**, which now

revels in its ultra-liberal denominational status and its radical modernistic theology. It names a man (Alexander Campbell) as its founder and ridicules the very concept of restoring New Testament Christianity. The other is the **Independent Christian Church**, sometimes called the “Conservative Christian Church” (the “Less-liberal Christian Church” would be more accurate). However, it is “conservative” only in comparison with the Disciples of Christ, not with the New Testament church. It has continued to add numerous innovations to its doctrine and practice in the course of its existence.

When the devastating split was recognized in 1906, the census showed that eighty-five percent of the church was captured by the liberal element. This meant that faithful brethren in most places had their buildings and congregations ruthlessly seized from them and had to start all over with only a small remnant of the congregation. However, now free of having to expend so much energy and expense in fighting the liberals, faithful brethren could turn all of their attention to evangelism. In only fifty years, the church of Christ would far outgrow the liberal elements that had apostatized, in fact, becoming the fastest growing religious body in America for a few years at mid-century.

While the church was riding the crest of this wave of growth in the late 1950s and early 1960s some of the “mainline” denominations (e.g., Methodists, Presbyterians, Lutherans, Episcopalians, et al.) were being overwhelmed with modernism. They were “sitting ducks” for modernism because they had long been enslaved to liberal theology and hermeneutics, which had produced liberal doctrine and practice (a part of which was “fellowship-everybody-ism”). These religious bodies, captured almost totally by modernism, no longer stand for anything but super-tolerance of everything and everybody (except those who dare expose them). The Southern Baptist Church began to feel the same pressures in the 1970s and those in that denomination who still claim to believe in the inspiration and authority of the Bible are in a fight-to-the-finish struggle with liberals and modernists for control. This struggle threatens to split the Baptists right down the middle.

It was predictable that sooner or later these religious currents would affect the Lord’s church. There had been isolated cases of liberalism all through the years, but they were just that. Even as late as the mid-1960s when a liberal preacher or professor was discovered he was generally dismissed and deprived of a pulpit or professor’s lectern unless he repented. Liberalism would soon prove to be not so isolated and unpopular. One of the early indications of a more widespread influence of liberalism among us was the accusation from some brethren in the early 1960s that preachers had over-emphasized the plan of salvation to the neglect of Christ Himself. The *Man or the Plan* issue, as it came to be popularly styled, was thoroughly

discussed in the papers. This was an early attempt by some to shift emphasis away from sound doctrine, which doubtless had some success to that end.

More and more promising young men who attended colleges operated by our brethren to prepare themselves to preach were being encouraged by their professors to immediately pursue graduate and post-graduate degrees in sectarian schools, generally staffed with modernistic professors. As they did so, they were coming back to teach in “our” colleges and preach in our pulpits. As time would prove, many of them had embraced liberal theological concepts, while some of them had lost their faith altogether. By the late 1960s liberal elements were beginning to surface more profusely. Generally, they were calling for a “restructuring” of the church and had the disposition of mind to challenge every precept, practice, and principle of New Testament Christianity, including the doctrine of fellowship.

*Mission*, a monthly journal that first appeared in July 1967, played a leading role in this effort. Until its demise about twenty years later it would carry the banner of liberalism (at times evincing tinges of modernism) for the young liberals in the church. It attacked the concept of a Biblical pattern for the church and fellowship at least as early as January 1973. Likewise, in the late 1960s Reuel Lemmons, editor of *The Firm Foundation*, defended Pat Boone’s fellowship with the Pentecostal self-proclaimed “faith healer,” Oral Roberts on nationwide television. The attack on Scriptural fellowship was accelerating.

By the early 1970s the liberal “snowball” had begun to gain momentum. Congregations controlled by liberal elements were increasingly easy to find. To be liberal was now becoming more and more accepted and those who had apparently for a long time been “closet liberals” began coming out into the open. It became increasingly possible for a liberal preacher or professor not only to find a place to preach or teach, but to hold on to his position and even be honored. The influential Highland Church of Christ in Abilene, Texas, and the Herald of Truth radio and television programs Highland sponsored came under strong criticism for their liberal leanings. This culminated in a marathon meeting in Memphis, Tennessee in 1973 attended by over two hundred preachers and numerous representatives of Highland and Herald of Truth. The meeting only intensified the fears of concerned brethren. All of these liberal influences had implications and impacts on the doctrine and practice of fellowship.

Institutions of higher learning were a fertile breeding-ground for the liberalism that carried away so much of the church in the nineteenth century. They are repeating this dubious function in this century. Pepperdine University has long been a bastion of liberalism on the West Coast, even from the 1950s. Their concept of fellowship is best demonstrated by the fact that they have non-Christians on their faculty and board and have for many years been a haven for

purveyors of every strange doctrine in their lectureships. The other colleges were generally perceived as conservative—with some more so than others—until the 1970s. With the retirement of Don Morris and the installment of John Stevens as president of Abilene Christian College in 1970, a spirit of unprecedented tolerance on that campus soon became observable. The drift to the left in Abilene was clearly underway, hand-in-hand with Abilene's Highland Congregation. The Bible department and the lectureship gradually began to be more and more staffed with men of "uncertain sounds," including on the subject of fellowship. With succeeding administrations the drift has become an open and obvious shift.

Expressions of concern in 1986 over the documented teaching in science classes of theistic evolution and that Genesis 1 is a "myth" were met with denial of the facts and defense of the teachers involved.<sup>11</sup> Abilene Christian University (as it was re-named) has become one of the foremost proponents and encouragers of liberalism through as the following:

1. Outrageously heretical statements, both orally and in writing, by various men on the faculty of the Bible College and the president himself
2. Books published by the ACU Press and authored by ACU professors
3. The almost exclusive use of liberal speakers on their lectureships, workshops, and seminars in the 1980s and 1990s
4. The appointment in 1992 of a Methodist preacher, enrolled as a student at ACU, as editor of the school paper, was defended by the president
5. The hosting of "Unity Forum XII" November 1–3, 1994, in which a group of liberal brethren played their continuing annual game of compromise with those in the Independent Christian Church

All of these things relate directly to the tearing down of the limits and bounds of fellowship as set forth in the New Testament. Lamentably, several other colleges and universities supported by the Lord's people are rapidly following the ecumenical, "unity-in-diversity" lead of ACU.<sup>12</sup>

A series of "scholars' conferences" was begun in the late 1980s, hosted by a different one of our colleges or universities each year. These have encouraged and produced some of the most liberal, "fellowship-everybody," and generally anti-Biblical declarations and proposals imaginable. Certainly, liberalism has found a mighty ally in these schools, originally founded to safeguard the faith.

In 1983, Rubel Shelly shocked the brotherhood by declaring his new-found ecumenism (as quoted earlier) that he believed there were faithful and devout Christians among all the denominations. This represented a total reversal of his strong stance spanning several years in defense of the Truth. He soon lent his considerable influence in Nashville, Tennessee, to the

beginning of a series of “unity forums” with the Independent Christian Church, which are still convening annually. The first one, styled a “Restoration Summit Meeting,” was held in 1984. These have involved only a very few brethren known for their doctrinal soundness as speaking participants, and most of those were in the earliest years. In spite of the hundreds of hours spent in these discussions, the ICC people have adamantly said they are not about to give up their unscriptural innovations, particularly instrumental music in worship. Meanwhile, many of our soft, compromising, and “irenic” brethren who have been participating are now urging that we treat the use of instruments as merely a matter of opinion or conscience, rather than one involving Scriptural authority. In 1985 Calvin Warpula, one of the frequent speakers on the Unity Forums, dogmatized that it was “untenable” to demand that ICC folks publicly repent of error and sin in using instruments in worship before we extend fellowship to them.<sup>13</sup> The unity forums have definitely brought many more liberals into the open and have emboldened others who were already of a liberal spirit. They have unquestionably fostered a departure from Biblical convictions in some on the subject of fellowship.

*Mission* magazine was but a precursor of even more liberal journals to come. When William Cline and Buster Dobbs purchased *The Firm Foundation* from the Showalter family in 1983, Reuel Lemmons was relieved as editor and the paper was restored to a Scripturally sound emphasis and direction. Within a year after his dismissal from *The Firm Foundation*, Lemmons had found backing from Alton Howard for a new journal where he could have even greater freedom to propagate his liberalism—*Image magazine*. In 1992 Rubel Shelly was instrumental in beginning an even more liberal journal, which he named *Wineskins*. *The Christian Chronicle*, which all but died in the 1970s, was revived by Oklahoma Christian University in the 1980s and they have made it into a major “unity-in-diversity” organ under Howard Norton, editor and chairman of the Bible College at OCU. A spate of books from liberal brethren, many of them professors in our universities, has flowed from the presses during the 1980s and 1990s, and their central theme is one: The church must make whatever changes are necessary, including the broadening of its fellowship, to attract modern society. They have all but completely abandoned any quest for Scriptural authority for their changes. Books and periodicals have played a major role in leading many astray.

Ecumenism has also received great impetus from various workshops, seminars, and lecture programs. In 1978 the first Tulsa Soul-Winning Workshop was conducted. By 1980 the liberal doctrinal agenda of this annual event was clearly evident. From year to year it has featured some of the most liberal and denominationally minded men among us and it remains a major rallying point for such. Its speakers have not been timid about urging fellowship with those

outside the family of God. In 1989 three of the largest and most liberal churches in and around Nashville, Tennessee (Woodmont Hills, Madison, Antioch), planned the first “Nashville Jubilee,” which has become another hotbed of avant-garde doctrine and practice. When the lectureships of some of our higher institutions of learning (as already mentioned) are added to these efforts, they constitute a powerful force for the “gospel of change” concerning fellowship as legislated by the Son of God.

Rubel Shelly has been the foremost advocate among us of fellowship with children of darkness in recent years, both in word and deed. Besides his statement that he believed there to be devout Christians in all the denominations (1983) and his lead in the ecumenical forums with the ICC (1984 to the present), he has more recently been even more blatant. On April 10, 1994 he was the featured speaker at the ecumenical post-Easter “celebration” of seven denominations (including the Woodmont Hills Church of Christ Denomination for which he preaches). It included the employment of various kinds of unauthorized music, including choir singing and a brass band. The theme of his sermon was unity and fellowship based on the “central” and “core” themes of the Gospel, of which the resurrection is an example (never mind such trivialities as God’s law on worship, organization and church polity). Three days later (he was a busy boy that week!) he spoke at Christ’s Church, a Pentecostal Holiness group in Nashville. He praised their pastor as a “godly man” and said that God’s kingdom is “wider, deeper, larger, greater” than any of the denominations. He condemned the setting of boundaries against one another in religion and gave the Lord’s church a good bashing much to the delight of his sectarian audience. He called the church “our little part of the body of Christ.”<sup>14</sup> One could not frame statements more directly opposite to the New Testament doctrine of fellowship.

### **The Change Agents and the War on Fellowship**

The liberal change agents in the church are attacking the Bible and the church on several fronts, every one of which is purposely designed to relax the boundaries of fellowship or which will result in the same nonetheless. Consider the following points of attack:

**1. The push to change the way the Bible is to be viewed and interpreted.** Some of the liberals who attended the first unity forum with the ICC in 1984 came home crying for a “new hermeneutic” (i.e., a new set of rules of Bible interpretation) so we could have fellowship with those in the ICC in spite of their apostate condition. A few years later some of the self-proclaimed “scholars” began to holler for a “new hermeneutic” at the “scholars’ conferences.” They want to discard any respect for the prohibitive nature of the silence of Scripture. They would have us believe we do not have any law under Christ, that the New Testament is not “a constitution,” but merely a “love letter” from Heaven. They deny that the Bible contains patterns

for our behavior or that we must strictly follow it. Some have already taken positions, the implications of which deny the verbal, plenary inspiration of Scripture. What chance has the Scriptural teaching on fellowship if such ideas prevail?

**2. The push for changes in our worship.** Some are suggesting the observance of the Lord's Supper on other days besides the Lord's day. Some now say that the use of mechanical instruments of music in worship is a non-issue and that they have no scruples against them and can worship with those who use them. An increasing number of congregations are regularly using "special" or "presentation" music (i.e., solos, choirs, and other groups separate from the congregation) in their worship assemblies. Suave promoters giving pop-psychology pep talks laced with a few funny stories long ago replaced Bible-quoting preachers in many pulpits. Drama and theatrical productions are frequently filling the normal sermon time in some congregations. The practice of those in the congregation lifting their hands up over their heads during songs and prayers and applauding at points of agreement with the preacher, at a baptism, or at some announcement is on the rise. Some have already done away with a Gospel invitation and ridicule those who continue to offer one at each assembly. It has become increasingly common for congregations to meet only on Sunday morning and to replace the normal evening worship period with "cell" or "life group" meetings in homes. Some congregations now have two morning worship assemblies. One is structured along "traditional" lines and is conducted for those who might be offended by "non-traditional" practices. The other, labeled "contemporary worship," is for liberals who care little or none for Scriptural authorization for what they say or do. Rather, they want to experiment with the old hollow, worn out practices and rituals of sectarianism or the religious jive of Pentecostalism, as if they possessed some magical formula for creating "spiritual worship." All of these represent major alterations that already greatly affect the subject of fellowship.

**3. The push for changes in the very nature of the church.** More and more are indicating their completely denominational view of the church. Shelly and his partner in religious crime (Randy Harris) advocate taking the personal traits of Jesus alone as a "paradigm" (a synonym for "pattern," but they would not stoop to use such an offensive word) for the church and altogether disregarding Acts through Revelation for information on the church.<sup>15</sup> Of course, every move to change the elements and/or acts of worship, discussed above, also directly affects the church. Further, a corruption of the nature of the church must drastically affect the subject of fellowship.

**4. The push for changes in the role of women in the church.** The secular, social, political, and humanistic "women's liberation movement" of the 1970s and 1980s has had an



obvious influence on some brethren who seem to care more about being “politically correct” than about being doctrinally correct. The liberals are pushing women into leadership roles in the church as rapidly as they can. Their usual beginning point is to use them as ushers or announcers and to pass the trays during the Lord’s Supper.<sup>16</sup> The next “progression” in the incremental change agenda of the liberals is to have them read Scripture (perhaps while seated on the front pew) or lead a song or a prayer. Then they further “progress” to have them teach mixed adult classes, with the intent eventually to move them into the pulpit. At least one Alabama congregation has published its agenda for appointing women as deacons, then as elders, and finally, turning the pulpit over to them. Faithful brethren will have no choice but to refuse to fellowship such apostates who are moving ever closer to denominational status and fellowship ties with denominationalism.

**5. The push for changes relating to the plan of salvation.** Carroll D. Osburn, “Distinguished Professor of New Testament” at ACU, avers: “There should be room in the Christian fellowship for those who believe that Christ is the Son of God, but who differ on...soteriological matters such as whether baptism is ‘for’ or ‘because of’ the remission of sins.”<sup>17</sup> Jimmy Allen, long-time Bible professor at Harding University, has written a book wholly devoted to the proposition that a believer need not know or understand the Scriptural purpose of his/her baptism for it to be Scriptural baptism.<sup>18</sup> These quotations are crucial to the issue of fellowship. If it makes no difference whether baptism is “for” or “because of” remission of sins and if immersion “for any reason” is Scriptural, then we are actually in fellowship with millions of denominationalists.

**6. The push for changes relating to moral issues.** In the 1970s some prominent brethren, led by James D. Bales of the Harding University Bible faculty, began advancing doctrines that relaxed the Lord’s teaching on marriage, divorce, and remarriage in Matthew 19:9. As a direct result of the “loopholes” he and others invented in God’s law for marriage, we now have men in leadership roles (preachers, elders, deacons, Bible class teachers) in some congregations who have divorced and remarried on grounds other than fornication. There are likely thousands of couples by now whose adulterous marriages have been justified by themselves and by church leaders on the basis of these alleged “loopholes”—and who are accepted as faithful members in hundreds of congregations. We now have brethren who defend “social drinking” of alcoholic beverages, dancing, the wearing of immodest apparel in public, public mixed swimming, and playing the state lottery. Some have already suggested an attitude of tolerance on the subject of abortion.<sup>19</sup> All of these relate to the subject of who will or will not be retained in the fellowship of the local congregation.

**7. The push for changes relating to fellowship explicitly.** Rubel Shelly has publicly renounced his former Scriptural convictions in favor of liberal views of Ephesians 4:4–6 and 2 John 9, which views imply the existence of fellowship between all who believe in the atonement of Christ for our sins and in His Deity.<sup>20</sup> Carroll Osburn likewise argues that 2 John 9 refers only to teaching concerning the nature of the Christ and therefore fellowship should not be withheld from those who do not believe the Lord's supper should be taken every Sunday, those who wish to use instrumental music in worship, premillennialists, or (as noted above) even those who teach that baptism is "because of" remission of sins.<sup>21</sup> The move for unity and fellowship with the Independent Christian Church (and with other denominations as well) is both the effect of this push for a broader fellowship and the cause of additional efforts of this sort. More and more preachers, especially in the large city churches, are joining denominational Ministerial alliances.

### **How Shall We Combat the Attacks on Fellowship?**

We must not conclude this chapter without exploring some possible ways to repel the assaults against the Lord's church on the issue of fellowship. I suggest the following:

1. We must understand what fellowship means and help others to understand it also. It is to jointly partake or participate with others in a common blessing, experience, work, or some other such thing. It is the bond that exists between those who share in a common relationship due to meeting like qualifications, conditions, or characteristics. It may involve a giving and/or receiving between ourselves and others. Those who have fellowship with one another in spiritual matters are those who have obeyed the Gospel plan of salvation and who are continuing to "walk in the light."

2. We must understand what the Bible teaches about who we should and should not fellowship. A better lengthy treatise on the subject could not be desired than Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 6:14–18:

Be not unequally yoked with unbelievers: for what fellowship have righteousness and iniquity? or what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what portion hath a believer with an unbeliever? And what agreement hath a temple of God with idols? for we are a temple of the living God; even as God said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come ye out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch no unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be to you a Father, and ye shall be to me sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

This passage (along with many others) will prevent one who is serious about loyalty to Christ from having any spiritual fellowship with any member of a denomination or anyone else outside the body of Christ. It will also prevent one from having fellowship with many who are

members of the Lord's church, as many passages instruct (Mat. 18:15–17; Rom. 16:16–18; 1 Cor. 5; 2 Thess. 3:6, 14; Tit. 3:10; et al.).

3. We must identify and refuse to extend fellowship to those who were once among us, but who have now (I say it with great sorrow) gone over to the enemy and are trying to take the entire church with them. It is far past time that we quit coddling, tolerating, and handling with kid gloves these folk as if they were still deserving of some degree of respect and credibility. There is no justifiable reason to pretend that they are something besides what they are—evil and ungodly men who are bent on destroying the church of God. We must recognize that they have made shipwreck of the faith and they have gone so far in their rebellion that in many cases to refer to them with the warm familial term, “brother,” is to besmirch it. As John wrote of the anti-Christ of his day, so he could write of these: “They went out from us,... but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they all are not of us” (1 John 2:19).

These include such men as Carroll Osborn, Rubel Shelly, Mike Cope, Royce Money, Max Lucado, Jeff Walling, Marvin Phillips, Steve Flatt, Lynn Anderson, Alton Howard, Harold Hazelip, Michael Armour, Calvin Warpula, and a host of others of their ilk (“And what shall I more say? for the time will fail me if I tell of Jim Woodroof, Randy Harris, Phillip Morrison, Denny Boultinghouse,...” [Heb. 11:32]). By the words these men have spoken, written, and published and by the things they have done and are doing deliberately, repeatedly, and openly (we can only imagine what they have done and said in private chambers) they have shown beyond any question for even the least observant saint that they are on a mission to destroy the church of the Lord. Their method is to so cloud the perception of what the church is that brethren will perceive it to be merely a humanly devised denomination (and a second-rate one at that) and will thereupon join in fellowship with and be lost in the cesspool of denominationalism at large.

With much grief we must say that these also include such congregations as Woodmont Hills and Madison (Nashville), Richland Hills and Midtown (Fort Worth), Preston Road, Skillman Avenue, Highland Oaks, and Preston Crest (Dallas), Garnet and Memorial (Tulsa), Highland and Hillcrest (Abilene), White Station and Highland (Memphis) and many, many others. These have shown their true colors, not over a few weeks or months, but over many years in most cases. Their elders and deacons (at least in the majority) are apostate and they have employed, endorsed, and financially supported (in some cases with six figure salaries) some of the rankest heretics among us and they continue to do so. They have not just temporarily and innocently “made a mistake” in these matters which they are trying to correct. Rather, they are firmly settled in their direction and they will not be turned back in spite of numerous pleas and warnings.

Can individuals mark and refuse to extend fellowship to an entire congregation? In spite of loud protestations to the contrary, indeed they can! The Lord threatened to do so to the churches at Ephesus and Laodicea (Rev. 2:5; 3:16). We are to have His mind (Phi. 2:5) and to walk as He walked (1 John 2:6). Was it wrong for John to mark them by writing what the Lord instructed him to write about them? Can one congregation mark and refuse to fellowship another congregation? Would it have been wrong for Smyrna and Philadelphia to publicly announce that Ephesus and Laodicea were no longer to be extended fellowship until they repented? In principle, if it is wrong to publicly mark and refuse to have fellowship with an apostate congregation that has “Church of Christ” on its building, then it is also wrong to mark one publicly that has always been apostate which has “First Christian Church,” “Methodist Church,” or “Pentecostal Church” on its building.

Christians are commanded to have no fellowship with those in darkness or their works, but to reprove them (Eph. 5:11). By whose dictum does this apply only to one individual toward another or to a congregation toward one of its own members? If an individual can mark and avoid another individual who is factious (Tit. 3:10), can he do the same to two or to ten? If there are one hundred or one thousand who are “walking disorderly” it is a strange doctrine indeed that says we are proscribed from marking and withdrawing from them (Rom. 16:17–18; 2 The. 3:6) just because they constitute an entire congregation. Indeed, it is a doctrine of the devil, designed to shield the guilty from exposure and censure while they do their nefarious business.

4. We must not associate with those who are in error in any way that can be interpreted as approval or endorsement of them. Further, we must rebuke those who, though they do not themselves actually teach error concerning fellowship or related subjects, will still associate with, defend, and give implied endorsement to those who do. Robert R. Taylor, Jr. gives an excellent description of this all too frequent phenomenon in the following passage:

It is difficult to figure out some of our brethren in their inconsistent actions. They will bemoan the liberal spirit that is capturing large portions of our once uniformly conservative brotherhood. Yet on a continuing and even increasing basis they will appear with them on lectureships, workshops, seminars, and other occasions. It would be wonderfully courageous and highly commendable if they went to unmask their errors and uphold Truth with militant majesty; yet this they do not do as a general rule.... If they went there with the spirit of Elijah before Ahab or the false prophets of Baal, the spirit of noble Nathan before adulterous David, the spirit of John the Baptist before Herod and Herodias, the spirit of Christ before Pharisaic hypocrites, or the courage of Paul facing Judaizing troublemakers, they would not have the welcome mat extended to them for repeat performances. Will any doubt it? If so, on what logical basis?<sup>22</sup>

In my boyhood days on a central Texas ranch we had several hundred goats. I often heard the expression, “You can’t run with the goats without smelling like them.” While these

exact words are not in Scripture, the principle they embody is. Verily, “Evil companions corrupt good morals” (1 Cor. 15:33). For the same reason and in like manner, close companionships with apostates tend to corrupt sound doctrine. Even if a brother who associates with liberals and heretics in a close and friendly way does not actually succumb to the error of those companions, undoubtedly his boldness to cry out against such errors is thereby blunted and he tarnishes his own reputation by doing so.

Those who do such and who are called to account for it often squeal in protest that we are assigning “guilt by association.” In their view, there is no such thing. However, if John does not teach this principle, I fail to see what he is teaching:

Whosoever goeth onward and abideth not in the teaching of Christ, hath not God: he that abideth in the teaching, the same hath both the Father and the Son. If any one cometh unto you, and bringeth not this teaching, receive him not into your house, and give him no greeting: for he that giveth him greeting partaketh in his evil works (2 John 9–11).

The brother who would receive a false teacher into his house and give him greeting so as to imply encouragement and endorsement (“bid him God speed,” KJV) must share in the guilt of the false teacher’s sin. This is so even if the host in this case does not actually do any false teaching himself. **He is guilty merely by his amicable association with the heretic he befriends.**

5. Elders must be awakened to their pivotal role in all of this. False teachers would never have gained such notoriety and influence if elders had not provided safe havens for them and continued to use them. Even now, some otherwise sound and conservative elderships see no inconsistency in inviting a false teacher for a Gospel meeting or workshop of some sort. Likewise, they will allow programs featuring false teachers to be announced from the pulpit, on bulletin boards, and through church bulletins. Perhaps elders could do more than almost any other one group in the church to halt the march of liberalism. Let them make it clear to their respective congregations that they will not knowingly invite liberals into their pulpits, either as local preachers or as guests, and let them forbid the publication of articles in their church bulletins that are written by these men (even if a given article teaches no error, the publication of his material gives the author undeserved credibility and implied endorsement). Rather, let them furnish the congregation with sound and strong reading materials, both in a good local bulletin and in journals such as *Contending for the Faith* and *Defender*.

### **Conclusion**

While anti-ism is not dead by any means (and likely never will be), I repeat for the sake of emphasis that the far more serious threat to the church of Christ during this last third of the twentieth century (and as we approach the twenty-first century) is definitely liberalism. While

anti-ism presses optional and incidental elements of the faith into law, it at least, in the main, is concerned about Scriptural authority, although it errs in its attempts to ascertain it. However, the frightful thing about liberalism is that it cuts loose from the Scriptures and their authority all who are ensnared by it and those whom they influence. Once liberalism is embraced there is no limit, no stopping place in religion, because only human standards remain.

The attack against the Scriptural teaching on the issue of fellowship is absolutely crucial. If the walls of Zion are breached at the gate of fellowship, the cause is lost utterly, for then the church will no longer have a Scriptural identity. It will simply be absorbed into the kingdom of darkness with all the rest of counterfeit Christendom. God forbid!

### Endnotes

1. All Scripture quotations are from the American Standard Version unless otherwise indicated.
2. Gerhard Kittel, ed. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1965), 3:798.
3. James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Pub., 1979), p. 43 (*Greek Dictionary at end of Concordance*).
4. Kittel, 3:809.
5. *The Analytical Greek Lexicon* (New York, NY: Harper and Brothers Pub., n.d.), p. 235.
6. Rubel Shelly, "ARBEIT MACHT FREI!" in *Love Lines* (Nashville, TN: Woodmont Hills Church of Christ, Oct. 31, 1990).
7. I do not use these terms with any unkind, disrespectful, or malevolent intent, but simply as terms of generally understood identity to assist the reader.
8. Some of the material in the remainder of the chapter was first published in a slightly different form in *The Church Enters the Twenty-first Century*, ed. David Brown (Spring, TX: Bible Resource Pub., 1994), pp. 348–37. I highly recommend this book.
9. Statement made in lecture by Rubel Shelly at annual "Preachers' Forum" near Centerville, TN, March 21, 1983.
10. Thomas B. Warren, *Lectures on Church Cooperation and Orphan Homes* (Moore, OK: National Christian Press, Inc., 1963).
11. Bert Thompson, *Is Genesis Myth?* (Montgomery, AL: Apologetics Press, Inc., 1986).
12. Actually, they are not truly ecumenical. Their ecumenicity extends only and always leftward.
13. Calvin Warpula, *One Body*, Winter, 1985, p. 31.
14. For a fuller discussion of Shelly's antics on these and other occasions see Curtis A. Cates, *The "Core/Bull's Eye Gospel" Concept Refuted* (Memphis, TN: Cates Pub., 1994), pp. 79–83.
15. Rubel Shelly and Randall J. Harris, *The Second Incarnation; A Theology for the 21st Century Church* (West Monroe, LA: Howard Pub. Co, 1992). The heresies in this book have been soundly and Scripturally answered by Curtis A. Cates, *The Second Incarnation: A Pattern for Apostasy* (Memphis, TN: Cates Pub., 1992) and Wayne Coats, *A Review of the Shelly-Harris Material on The Second Incarnation* (Mt. Juliet, TN: Coats Pub., 1992).
16. Dick Sztanyo in "An Overview of the Present Discussion: The Role of Women in the Church" in *Women to the Glory of God*, ed. Jim Laws (Memphis, TN: Getwell Church of Christ, 1994), pp. 154–155.
17. Carroll D. Osburn, *The Peaceable Kingdom: Essays Favoring Non-Sectarian Christianity* (Abilene, TX: Restoration Perspectives, 1993), pp. 90–91.
18. Jimmy Allen, *Rebaptism* (West Monroe, LA: Howard, Pub. Co., 1991).

19. David Vanderpool, "Abortion: A Look at Questions and Controversies Surrounding a Major Societal Issue" in *The Christian Chronicle*, Nov. 1993, pp. 14–15.
20. Rubel Shelley, *I Just Want To Be a Christian* (Nashville, TN: 20<sup>th</sup> Century Christian, 1984), p. 82; *The Restoration Movement and Unity" Preachers and Church Leaders Forum* (Henderson, TN: Freed-Hardeman College, 1986). p. 72.
21. Osburn, pp. 71. 90–91.
22. Robert R. Taylor, Jr., "Where and When Shall We Draw the Line of Fellowship?" in *Studies in Joshua, Judges, and Ruth*, ed. Dub McClish (Denton, TX: Valid Pub., Inc., 1994), p. 528.

**[Note:** I wrote this MS for and presented a digest of it orally at the Memphis School of Preaching Lectures, hosted by the Knight Arnold Church of Christ, Memphis, TN, March 26–30, 1995. It was published in the book of the lectures, *Shall We Restructure the Church of Christ?* ed. Curtis A. Cates (Memphis, TN: Memphis School of Preaching, 1995).]