

## CHRISTIAN FELLOWSHIP BOUNDARIES

From: Texter Mountain Mennonite Church, PA.

I extend Christian greetings to each one gathered here, may the word continue to speak to our hearts and become and be living in our experience. I appreciate what was shared that thus far in the service in the devotional meditation by the brother in looking at the Balance of God, God's perfection in Holiness and righteousness, love, justice and judgment.

This morning I would like to think of a subject that relates very closely to maintaining our faith and maintaining sound doctrine, maintaining our practice of what we have. We have sometimes been accused of being exclusive as it relates to our fellowship and we do not apologise for that, the Scriptures speak about a separation in fellowship, and I have chosen to look at that subject, the title of my message is Christian Fellowship Boundaries. I have chosen to look at a text verse from 1 John 1:3 the thought of that our fellowship is with the Father and His son Jesus Christ, "that you also may have fellowship with us" is the phrase. I would like to read here the chapter of 1 John 1 and notice some conditions or the basis of spiritual fellowship, I would like to note the words of the title a little after we read this passage.

### [1 John 1:1-10](#)

"That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life; (For the life was manifested, and we have seen *it*, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;) That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship *is* with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that 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 the truth: But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us."

The theme of this chapter may not be only fellowship, but you notice that the word "fellowship" is mentioned several times here and I think it is clear that the fellowship that we enjoy relates to a life, a commitment of life, and fellowship with God.

Looking at the words in the title "Christian Fellowship Boundaries."

First of all fellowship has the idea of communion, it has the thought of communion we have, fellowship with the Father, we have fellowship one with another, there is a communion, there is a sharing together that is part of that experience. I think of the verse in [Revelations 3:20](#) where Jesus was outside the door, He was standing at the door and knocking and He said; "If any man will open the door I will come in to him and sup with him and he with Me." The idea of communion, a fellowship, to sup with Him and He with me. I always thought of us fellowshiping with Christ in that verse, of how much we need His communion, how much we need to fellowship with Him but there is also something that Christ desires of us it says; "That I may sup with him." Christ is saying that He wants to fellowship, He wants to have communion with us. And what fellowship does Jesus receive from us? That is a question for us to ponder. I think He desires our willingness to allow Him to fill our lives and He desires to meet the needs, to strengthen our weaknesses, to bear our burdens and to carry our sorrows, that is what He desires in that fellowship.

Fellowship is a communion, a sharing in common, a partnership, [Ephesians 5:7-8](#) speaks about partakers, it gives a catalogue of sins that individuals are caught in that are living after the flesh, and it says "therefore be not partakers with them" it has the thought of **do not** fellowship with them. Verse 11 of

that chapter then speaks of having no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness. The word fellowship, the word communion, the word partakers, these relate to fellowship.

In [2 Peter 1:1](#) the apostle Peter writes the epistle to those that have obtained like precious faith, and I think the thought of sharing in common is part of fellowship. In order to have fellowship there must be something that is in common, that we have something to share. People of the world have what we would call a social fellowship, where they have something in common, it draws them together, people have a certain hobby or certain interest that works on the social level, and that is probably all right in its place in a certain measure, but this is like precious faith, it is sharing in common because of a change of life, because of regeneration, because we have fellowship with the Father. Fellowship also involves communication, it is an enhanced through sharing communication.

Looking at the word boundaries. Christian Fellowship Boundaries.

Boundaries are dividing lines. I think of a boundary as oftentimes in relation to a property boundary, or land boundaries, nation's borders, the line or border between counties, it is a boundary, it divides, it established and defines a limit to that which is contained in a certain area. Lines, boundaries are also established so that we do not cross because of danger, it helps to keep us safe and secure. There are boundaries that we set for our children, perhaps we say: "You can go so far but don't go out this close to the road, you stay back this far." And they should know that. I remember when I was a child at one place that we had lines painted on the driveways, there was a circular drive in from the main highway into the children's home and back out again, and that driveway extended out quite far but there was a line painted there that the children could go to, so far to the line. I remember some would go to that line with their bare feet and stand right at the line and they knew this is how far they could go. I think there was a certain measure of security in that too, knowing that they were where they should, be even though they were at the line, they where they should be and no further. Lines are for safety, boundary lines also provide security and are meant to keep us safe and secure.

Thinking of fellowship boundaries, there is lines that protect our fellowship and our spiritual life. This is what we are thinking of as fellowship boundaries, lines that are drawn, lines that are decided upon by our leadership, by a consensus of the group, by past precedent, by workings of the past where we draw lines as it relates to our fellowship.

I'd like to look at some of the conditions or the basis for spiritual fellowship.

Looking at some principles that outline in a general way the conditions for our spiritual fellowship. [1 John 1:2](#) says; "The life was manifested and we have seen it," That eternal life that was with the Father was manifested unto us, referring to Jesus Christ, John says we have touched Him, we have handled Him, in verse 1, it is Christ, He was the living word, He was the message of God to man and it was Jesus Christ that was manifested. I believe the basis for our fellowship is that God has reached out, God seeks for our fellowship, He has reached out and provided a means by which man can have fellowship. Christ is the one, the provision of Jesus Christ is the basis for our spiritual fellowship, the one who provided a way back to God when that fellowship was severed. We think of that in the Garden of Eden where Adam and Eve sinned, it broke that fellowship with God where they could walk with God and talk with God and commune with God. It was apparently a very close relationship, probably closer in some ways than what we have now because they did not have the fallen nature, the sin nature, and yet we do have a closeness through redemption that draws us back to God and through Christ we can have that fellowship. We can come boldly to the throne of grace where we can find mercy and grace to help in our time of need. We can find that as we take the person of Jesus Christ into our life.

[1 John 1:7-9](#) speaks of a spiritual cleansing;

"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin. <sup>8</sup>If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. <sup>9</sup>If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us *our* sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

A spiritual cleansing, these verses speak about the blood that cleanses us and as we confess our sins we are cleansed from unrighteousness. That is the cleansing that is a basis and condition for fellowship with God and also with spiritual people. The cleansing blood of Christ enables us to have fellowship with God. Separation from evil is also in focus here, the thought of God is Light and in Him is no darkness at all, no shade of inconsistency, there is no shade of darkness or confusion. God is light, it is clear there is not a shadow of turning with God, James speaks about that God is the Father of lights and there is no shadow, there is not even the least hint of turning or inconsistency or darkness. [See James 1:17]

With the one who has been born from above, in John 3, where Jesus describes the new birth, the spiritual birth, the birth from above He says that; [John 3:20-21](#) "Everyone that doeth evil hateth the light, neither cometh to the light lest his deeds should be proved, but he that doeth truth comes to light that his deeds may be made manifest that they are wrought in God." The light of truth is the basis for spiritual fellowship and one who is walking in truth welcomes the light of truth, it is a growing experience, we live in the light and we love the truth, we will also welcome the truth and will not tolerate any disobedience or any shade or shadow of darkness since God is light. 1 John Chapter 2 gives another basis or we could say another condition for fellowship.

[1 John 2:3-6](#)

"And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected: hereby know we that we are in him. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked."

I think of a heart in tune with God's heart. I think that God desires that we walk in His commandments because His commandments are for our spiritual life and are not grievous but for good and the love of God is perfected. Our love for Him is seen in our desire to please Him and to do everything to His approval and what He desires of us, to walk as Christ walked is also in verse six and is a basis for fellowship, a life that is patterned after Christ.

There is one more condition I see in that, maybe it is not as clear, that is in 1 John chapter 1 verse three where it speaks about fellowship with us;

[1 John 1:3](#)

"That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us:"

That is the text verse "that you may have fellowship with us," the thought of submission to a scriptural church where there is fellowship with others that is the condition, the condition is to be submitted to a scriptural church; fellowship with us.

Thinking more directly of fellowship boundaries.

Why do we need fellowship boundaries? Why do we set restrictions on who we fellowship with and who we do not fellowship with?

There have been those who say that we should accept anyone who says they are Christian and speaks/shares that Christ is alive and truth and in their life and is close to them. Well, God sets some restrictions in His word and we have in 1 John a number of tests of being in Christ, keeping the commandments, the thought of love for the brethren. A number of spiritual tests are given. We need fellowship boundaries because there are various shades of beliefs in the world today, and Satan is busy. First John speaks of the many spirits that have gone out into the world, there are many spirits that duplicate the true spirit, and that spirit is counterfeit of what God has taught. Fellowship does influence us, we need fellowship boundaries because of the way fellowship influences us. [1 Corinthians 15:33](#) "Be not deceived: evil communications corrupt good manners."

We need fellowship lines to determine what is truth and what is error. We were looking in our Sunday School lessons at some of the concepts of sound doctrines that help us to know where we draw the lines of fellowship, who we can fellowship with as it relates to our doctrine and our practice, what is safe for us. Fellowship does influence us sometimes negatively, sometimes unconsciously, even if we say it will not affect us, it does, we tend to reduce to the lowest common denominator if we allow a mixture in our

life or our church fellowship knowing it exists, or tolerate a spiritually unhealthy mixture. There have been those in the past where there has been an apostate setting where they advocate that; “You that are Conservative, holding to the truth, stay here and help us to keep things from drifting.” But there comes a point where our own spiritual safety can be compromised, can be in danger, if we allow close fellowship with individuals who are knowingly taking a course that is contrary to the scriptures.

We believe that the church fellowship is a close fellowship and when we have communion one with another, we are sharing together that we are one in Christ and we cannot continue to do that where we know that error is there, where there is disobedience to the scriptures. Fellowship with those who promote a wrong spiritual voice or a mixture of truth does make us partakers with them. The scripture is clear that by fellowshiping with those who teach false doctrines, those who are rebellious to the directives, those who are disobedient to the Word and to the Church of Christ, does make us in a sense partakers with them. We put a measure of approval on them when we maintain fellowship with them and that is why we need fellowship boundaries and respect fellowship lines that are given. If we tend to give a stamp of approval on those who take a wrong course, we give them wrong support.

Now there is a difference between fellowship and friendliness. We can be friendly with all men, we should be friendly with all men, but we cannot have fellowship with any and all.

In 1 Corinthians 5 I would just like to note a couple of verses there and possibly come back to this even a little later. Here in Corinthians 5 the Apostle Paul gave correction to the church to remove an individual who was knowingly involved in sin: [1Corinthians 5:9-10](#) “I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.”

The Apostle Paul is saying that you cannot have fellowship with them where it will affect your own spiritual life, just like leaven, he says in verse seven. He uses the idea of leaven in verse seven and eight, it tends to go through the whole mixture, yeast goes through the whole mixture of bread dough, it has a multiplying effect and it is amazing how fast it will do that too, given the right conditions it does affect the whole mixture. But the Apostle Paul says that you can't get out of the world, there is a place in being friendly or at least having some tie with an individual, especially as it relates to helping an individual to go back to the truth, there is a place for friendliness, but the danger is in fellowship where it endangers us. We believe that there is a difference, and there is a wall that separates too, as it relates to one who has moved away from the truth.

In relation to fellowship lines there is a danger possibly of being too sensitive, too exclusive, we have been accused of that, I suppose there is a danger there, but we tend to be too loose rather than too tight on fellowship lines. It is better to draw the lines tighter than being too loose and to be a little bit more firm, maybe there is a chance to relax, then to be too loose and to try to draw it all tighter. You know how it is in discipline, parents find it is true that it is better to be a little bit extra strict and then may be relax a little later when you find you're being too strict in one area, then to be too loose and trying to bring it back again, maybe there is a parallel there. We have to be careful in relation to our fellowship lines.

I would like to look at some directions from the scriptures on drawing fellowship lines. Ephesians five, I referred to this verse in relation to the meaning of fellowship,

[Ephesians 5:7](#) Be not ye therefore partakers with them. [Verse 11](#) “And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove *them*.”

We are to have no fellowship with outright evil. Where do we draw fellowship lines, whom do we fellowship with and whom do we not fellowship with?

Well it is very clear here, we do not fellowship with those involved in outright evil but rather reprove them. Fellowship here has the meaning of co-participation, don't have fellowship with them to the point where you actually become partakers or participants in what they are doing, that is a danger. We do rub shoulders with the world and some of us work in areas where there are unbelievers, some people that are involved in this catalogue of sins that is given in Ephesians 5, but we can be friendly, be involved in the business transaction or whatever needs to be done and yet not have fellowship to the point of co-

participation, we don't sit down and enjoy their fellowship and enjoy what they have to say, but we rather, as it says, reprove them -verse 11. I think the reproof does have a safety for us, the reproof does help to drive a stake in our own mind. Noah was a preacher of righteousness [2 Peter 2:5] and I think he was involved in reproof as he was building the Ark. There were other faithful believers in the midst of an evil society who spoke out such as Jeremiah. That is the protection we have, it is to speak out against evil around us lest we weaken and even come to the point where we can be a co-participant with them. Not having fellowship with outright evil.

In second Timothy there is another class of people we cannot have fellowship with, that is no fellowship with end time rebellion. A number of these verses here give a picture of individuals who have departed from a godly way of life.

[2 Timothy 3:1-7](#) “This know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, Without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, Traitors, heady, high-minded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God; Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts, Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.”

This scripture speaks of those who are involved in end time rebellion, the idea of boasters and covetous and proud and so on, it is also picture of these people who have a form of godliness but they are denying the power thereof. They are actually religious people that maybe speak about religious things and speak about Christ and they have a form of godliness, but here it becomes a little more difficult because in our drawing fellowship lines we need to know by their life and example, Apostle Paul says from such turn away. A number of the scriptures I'm noticing have words of separation: From such withdraw thyself, from such turn away and so on, we notice that. And here it is that in verse 5: They deny the power thereof; from such turn away. We avoid fellowship even with those that have a modified godliness, or a modified holiness we could say, they are ever learning but never able to come to the knowledge of the truth. No fellowship with end time rebellion

2 Corinthians 6 is another passage of scripture saying; No fellowship with unbelievers. We could say this is a classic or a timeworn passage, but it does further show that fellowship with unbelievers becomes an unequal yoke. It is actually impossible to maintain the separation and still be in fellowship together.

[2 Corinthians 6:14-18](#)

“Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers: for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness? and what communion hath light with darkness? And what concord hath Christ with Belial? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel? And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols? for ye are the temple of the living God; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in *them*; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean *thing*; and I will receive you, And will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.”

It is clear in this that there can be no fellowship between Christ and Belial, between light and darkness. God has set some bounds, God has set some lines of demarcation, some boundaries between light and darkness, in creation He separated the light from the darkness and the dry land from the water and made times and seasons, He made separations, He drew some lines and we would say that it would be incongruous for unbelievers then to feel that they could mix what God has set apart, God has set light and darkness as being completely separate and also sin and righteousness, and therefore we as believers cannot mix with those of a completely other persuasion. Be ye separate, touch not, stay away is the thought there. I think that there is a caution in a practical way.

We tend to water down the fellowship lines by becoming involved in unequally yoked fellowships, I thought of some of the worldly support groups where they offer support to various individuals, perhaps

individuals that have emotional problems, we can get some help from that and I think some of our people have at times got help from some of those support groups, but there is a danger there, an ever present danger of allowing our fellowship needs to be supplied at a wrong source, or we could say drinking at the wrong fountain. Or having our needs for fellowship supplied in an area that does not really meet the need, we do not really see eye to eye and it tends to water down our separation and compromise our stand on truth. I thought of some of the sales promotions, home sales parties, business associations, I think our church has spoken against some of these where we can become too closely involved and begin to work shoulder to shoulder with people of the world. I think also of the volunteer organisations, why we speak out against such if it means involvement with a number of other people outside our church fellowship. The closeness tends to supply a fellowship need we should only find met in a spiritual fellowship, that could threaten our separated way of life and our spiritual tie with our brethren and with our Lord.

First Timothy six shows another group of individuals whom we do not fellowship with, and that is with those promoting false doctrine, we looked at the thought of sound doctrine and how the Apostle Paul did deal with those individuals who were blaspheming, he said about Alexander and Hymenaeus :

[1 Timothy 6:3-5](#) “If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, *even* the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness; He is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, Perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness: from such withdraw thyself.”

Again we have that word: From such withdraw thyself. There is a Bible command, God has said here is a fellowship line that I have set, that you stay on the side that is safe, that is scripturally sound. There are individuals who come with a false doctrine and with a new idea or that which threatens the doctrine of the truth or even the teaching of the church. Sometimes it is very subtle, sometimes the promoter of a false teaching is very subtle, we need the help of our brethren to realise that and we need to honour then the church stand on how to relate to that type of influence or individuals. From such withdraw thyself.

Romans 16, verse 17 is another Bible command about those from whom we need to withdraw ourselves or draw our fellowship line between:

[Romans 16:17-18](#):

“Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.” [there it says avoid them, again a fellowship line] “For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.”

How that happens through the deception that is involved if one gives a listening ear to those that are seeking to cause division and offences by agitating or stirring up is through sowing discord among brethren; [See [Proverbs 6:14 & 19](#)] Individuals that we are aware of that are involved in that, we are to be alert to that and withdraw ourselves from them.

I believe the fellowship boundary applies to those who have known sin in their life, have been dealt with by the voice of the church, and the thought here 1 Corinthians 5 previously given, is that they were to purge out the old leaven, that referred to their own attitude in relation to the sin but also to deliver such a one to Satan, the separation.

We give support to our Church when there is action taken in relation to an individual with known sin. We draw a fellowship line and we do not share communion with those that have known sin in their life. It says in verse 11; “With such a one know not to eat.” I think that refers to the eating of communion. We do not draw the line as strict as some plain groups do who say: We will not eat any meals at all at the same table with them. Although I say we need to be careful as we do sit down to that, that we not become close in fellowship, but there is a place of possibly sharing a meal, if need be, to help them, but we do not share communion with them. When such a line is drawn we are no longer their best friends, we should still be friendly to maintain a spiritual interest to again restore the erring one, that is true. [Galatians 6:1](#) speaks about that, but we go in the spirit of meekness, we are concerned about their soul and want to restore them, they are a fallen brother that needs to be restored, it is our calling and yet we realise the dan-

ger could be in our own spiritual life, we are aware of ourself, we think of our own tendencies. Social fellowship should not go on as before, there is a difference when an individual is under Church censure. We must always identify with the Church and stand with the group voice and give our support and not by any means undermine by any way our fellowship in the way we fellowship with them.

I would like to look at another scripture in second Thessalonians, and this was in our Sunday School lesson last Sunday, we do not fellowship with those who walk disorderly

### [2 Thessalonians 3:6-8](#)

“Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves [there again it is the fellowship line, withdraw yourselves] from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us.”

The idea of disorderly has the thought of slack in performing scriptural obedience or taking an independent course, persisting and taking one's own way or independent thinking, a person that cannot bear to have their personal liberty infringed upon or curtailed or cannot submit to a scriptural church fellowship. It speaks specifically of the tradition received of us, the teaching, and the pattern of life. An individual like that who is taking a course away from the truth, we draw the line there in relation to have fellowship. We limit our fellowship with those who do not respond to instructions or administration, verse 14 of the same chapter;

[2 Thessalonians 3:14](#) “And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. Yet count *him* not as an enemy, but admonish *him* as a brother.”

There is the thought that we limit our fellowship with those that do not respond to instruction and yet we also seek the welfare of their soul, we seek their spiritual restoration. Social ties are different, we have no company, yet as a brother we seek his spiritual restoration.

Thinking on how broad or how restrictive should our fellowship be? There are those who have mocked at a church that has drawn fellowship lines and say that; “Well, in heaven we are not going to have a group here or a group there that we cannot fellowship with.” We say that is true. That is right, in heaven there will be a closeness that removes all the imperfections, the imperfections of understanding, and perhaps of human weakness, have been removed as one has been sanctified here on earth and allowed the blood of Jesus to cleanse us. We don't just judge every group but we say that for the safety of our group we do draw lines in order to maintain what we have. It is the epistle of John that speaks about that we are careful that we have a full reward, that we maintain what we have that we may have a full reward.

[2 John 1:8](#) “Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.”

The thought is that in order to maintain what we have decided as a church group and established we draw fellowship lines.

Some general guidelines on lines of fellowship.

It is of those of like precious faith, [\[read 2 Peter 1:1\]](#) Those who are of like precious faith we can fellowship with. We mentioned a number of principles that relates to having fellowship with the Father and walking in the truth. I think it is those who observe and believe in nonconformity and non-resistance. I picked out a number of general guidelines from the Mennonite Church Information book by Christian Light Publishers, they have a number of qualifications of the groups they have listed in that book, and I would say in relation to that we do not necessarily say that we have fellowship with all those groups, but here are some guidelines that would help us to know how to draw fellowship lines in a general way.

- ✓ There must be a scriptural position on the permanence of marriage.
- ✓ Our position on divorce and remarriage must be clear as it is given in the scriptures.
- ✓ The inerrancy of the scriptures is another basis for our lines of fellowship.
- ✓ The place of men in church leadership.
- ✓ The scriptural position on the Christian woman's veiling.

- ✓ Distinctive practices, the holy kiss and feet washing.
- ✓ Moral purity.
- ✓ A disciplined church group that follows a written discipline where it makes practical applications of scriptural principles.

These are some general guidelines and then there are also some more specific guidelines that we would want to notice briefly as well.

How do we relate to other groups, so-called Conservative Mennonites groups, in our fellowship boundaries? I think it is imperative that we do draw lines, it is also imperative that we do have interaction with other church groups beyond our church fellowship, I think it is for our survival as a church group that we do, and yet in order to maintain our distinctive practices, the applications that we have made to the scriptures. It is true that there are other groups that have made applications that may be as scriptural but are different from ours and we say we cannot follow those because we have chosen a pattern that we feel is scriptural and has served the Church well. We don't necessarily always judge other churches that are different to us but we would say that we draw fellowship lines in line with those who are similar in practice. We sometimes need to take a deeper evaluation than just the surface examination.

What would happen if we do not draw safe fellowship lines? I think it will affect our course of travel, as a church group, we may teach and preach and seek to uphold a practice but if there is a loose fellowship, if we allow fellowship with many different groups that do not practise specifically some of the distinctive practices that we do, we will gravitate to the lowest common denominator. We say it is safe to be more restrictive than to be looser. We certainly want a scriptural balance.

A failure to draw safe fellowship lines does tend to confuse the rising generation and that has been the case in the Old Testament and even in our times. Jehoshaphat in 2 Chronicles 20 we have the account where Jehoshaphat allied himself with the King of Israel

[2 Chronicles 20:35-37](#)

“And after this did Jehoshaphat king of Judah join himself with Ahaziah king of Israel, who did very wickedly: And he joined himself with him to make ships to go to Tarshish: and they made the ships in Ezion-gaber. Then Eliezer the son of Dodavah of Mareshah prophesied against Jehoshaphat, saying, Because thou hast joined thyself with Ahaziah, the LORD hath broken thy works. And the ships were broken, that they were not able to go to Tarshish.”

God could not condone that type of relationship and so the ships were broken, it says the Lord has broken thy works” the prophet told him.

Maybe that wasn't altogether the reason, but his son Jehoram in [2 Chronicles 21:4](#) says that when he was risen to the kingdom he; “slew all his brethren with the sword, and *divers* also of the princes of Israel. And then in [2 Chronicles 21:6](#) it says: “And he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, like as did the house of Ahab: for he had the daughter of Ahab to wife: and he wrought *that which was* evil in the eyes of the LORD.”

There is confusion and a loss when we do not draw safe fellowship lines. There is a loss to the next generation, and the next generation will fail to sense that godly way of a separated life.

We are not safe in ourselves in drawing fellowship lines but we must depend on the direction of the Lord in the scriptures. We must depend on the decisions of a faithful church fellowship, in our brotherhood consensus and thinking, there is safety for us and our heart must be the heartbeat of our group to survive spiritually.

I think the record of history is clear, the Waldensians were a group that illustrated the fact that a group when faced with intense persecution they remained a separate group and they maintained a scriptural practice. However when it came closer to the time of the Reformation, to the time of the forming of the Swiss brethren, some of the reformed pastors came to talk them into compromises, at least some of the

group was won over to join in fellowship ties with the reformed group and the main body of the Waldensians ceased to exist as a distinctive group when they did that.

I think the challenge for us is to continue to remain as a separate people, dependent upon God and our fellowship of those who believe like we do and can help us to be built up in the faith.

Our fellowship lines are important and we are not being judgemental when we draw lines, we are being realistic and protecting what we hold dear.

May we be faithful in drawing the lines, in showing love and consideration to those beyond our group but also being careful that we protect by drawing these lines, protect our fellowships so that we can maintain fellowship with our Lord and with one another.

Shall we kneel for prayer.

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