

APPLICATION OF FELLOWSHIP PRINCIPLE IN INTER-FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS, AND OTHER PERSONAL SITUATIONS

D.Fleischer

Minn. Delegate Conference

June 24, 1979

INTRODUCTION:

We start from the premise that each Christian member of our congregations desires to practice what the Lord teaches in His Word. How can it be otherwise in the face of the Word of God which says, " Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only deceiving your own selves." (James 1:22)

Yet, to practice what we hear from the Scriptures is at times difficult for us by reason of the sinful flesh. Each of us, for example, has his "pet" sins that are not easily given up. We assume that all of us will admit to weaknesses of the flesh by which our "hearing" and our "doing" contradict each other. For this we ask forgiveness.

At other times we find ourselves by reason of circumstances beyond our control forced with having to make a decision on the spot as to how we should react confessionally. Under stress we may do or say things that we wish later we hadn't done or said. We probably feel this concern most keenly within the area of concern to which our consideration addresses itself, because we ARE concerned with upholding the principles of the Word and a truly confessional life in an heavily pluralistic religious society.

THE AREA OF CONCERN:

As our title indicates we are addressing ourselves to "Interfamily" and "other personal" relationships in which we are confronted with the application of the fellowship principle, as outlined in Romans 16:17-18, 1 Corinthians 1:10, 2 Corinthians 6:14ff, etc. When we are in family gatherings which include a "mixed bag" of religious persuasions, shall we join in prayer? Or what if we are asked to lead a prayer in such situations? What about singing Christmas carols with family groups, or other groups where the unity of faith is absent? How about going to a wedding, a funeral, a confirmation in a church which teaches contrary to the Word of God? Shall I serve as a sponsor, or even as a witness in such a circumstance? There may be other situations, but this suffices to show the thrust of this paper. These examples will also remind us of the difficulty most of us feel in knowing the principle on one hand, and applying it in practice on the other.

OUR APPROACH:

We will set forth briefly by way of review what Scripture teaches regarding fellowship. by defining some terms essential to our understanding and application of the principle. We do not propose to give an answer to each individual circumstance that may arise in our daily life. Hopefully the principles will be sufficiently clear to know and apply the principles by the strength which God gives, in individual circumstances.

DEFINITIONS: Fellowship- Fellowship in the NT consisted of

- a) the kiss of peace 2 Cor. 13:12
- b) the right hand of fellowship Gal.2:9
- c) confession of sin one to another with prayer James 5:16
- d) assembling for worship and provoking one another to good works Heb.10:24-25
- e) Partaking of the Lord's Supper 1 Cor. 11:24-25
- f) helping the poor Acts 11:29
- g) bearing the infirmities of the weak Rom.15:1
- h) finally, any joint expression of faith, without distinction

69
29

as to whether it be pulpit, prayer, or altar fellowship Acts 2:42-45
Joining in church work, missions, Christian education, Christian
charity, etc are further manifestations of church fellowship.

All manifestations of fellowship where the unity of faith and confession are lacking is forbidden. To put it another way, All manner of unionism is forbidden. The Scriptural prohibition against unionism applies to the church collectively, as well as to individuals. (Review CCF)

Worship- The OT words which we translate "worship" either say of strongly imply bowing down before, or doing obeisance. The most widely used NT word which we translate "worship" mean to "kiss the hand toward one." Among the orientals it meant in practice to "fall upon the knees and touch the ground with the forehead." In the NT the usage is similar: "by kneeling or prostration to do homage or obeisance." Worship is the praise of God(Gottesdienst) (What Luther Says III, 5019)

Prayer- By simple definition prayer is "A child of God speaking with his Father." Prayer is an act of worship in which "we call upon Him in every trouble, pray, praise, and give thanks." The LC-MS catechism defines prayer as "an act of worship wherein we bring our petitions before God with our hearts and our lips and offer up praise and thanksgiving to Him.(1943 Ed.) No distinction is made of any sort when the Psalmist says, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer." (Psalm 19:14)

Music-Within the context of the church we can define music according to Ephesians 5:19, "Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord." Hymns of praise to the Lord sung, or played on musical instruments constitute worship. Such is the definition which applies in our worship services. The definition does not change because we may be making melody unto the Lord in private.

APPLICATION

Fellowship in worship service, in prayer, or in or by music are not three different fellowships in substance, but only in form. So what the Scriptures say applies in principle to any joint expression of faith in public or private. "Mark them which causes divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned and avoid them." Rom.16:17,cf.also v. 18)Another passage certainly is to the point "Can two walk together except they be agreed?" (Amos 3:3) Whatever difficulty we may have in applying the principle, let the principle stand! We are not to join in indiscriminate ^{fellowship} with any who teach or practice contrary to the Word of God.

There is no question that this confessional stand creates tension within family relationships; and even moreso within our conscience. After his conversion Naaman prayed,"when I bow down myself in the house of Rimmon, the Lord pardon Thy servant in this thing." 2 Kgs.5:18 He was told "Go in peace."(v.19) This response to Naaman's concern may seem on first reading to permit joining in prayer under certain circumstances. But we must note that Naaman himself was not praying to Rimmon, though his outward posture may have suggested it. That seems to be what troubled him. Furthermore, principle cannot be established on an isolated example, but only on clear words of Scripture. The fact that Naaman was told to go in peace does not destroy the principle of Scripture in regard to the practice of fellowship.

By the same token in isolated circumstances where we may feel it "excuseable" or where we may have made the wrong decision in moment of stress, we must be on guard that we do not indiscriminately set aside the principle. as being of no consequence. The safe guide in this area is:If your conscience troubles you, don't. And most certainly we should not initiate such situations where the Word of God and conscience is violated.

DISCUSSION: