

The Discipline of Fellowship

by Paris Reidhead

The church is to be a place of instruction, fellowship, and discipline, where believers can be nurtured and grown up in Christ.

Duration: 37:44

Scripture: Psalm 95:1

Topics: "Fellowship"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher discusses two distinct points of view regarding the purpose of the gospel. The first point of view is that the main goal of the gospel is to save people from hell and secure them against punishment. This perspective sees the church as primarily an evangelistic society. The second point of view emphasizes a deeper understanding of the gospel, focusing on the glory of Jesus Christ and the fellowship of the church. The preacher calls for a commitment to Christ and a willingness to live in unity with other believers.

Transcript

The Discipline of Fellowship. When you turn to Acts chapter 15, every group has its standards for membership. This we expect.

It has examination blanks that are presented to the one who would become a part of the group. Every group has a stated reason for being. If it doesn't have a reason for being, then it sooner or later loses its being.

It has to have justified itself in the minds of the people that are to be part of the group if it is to expect to have their support. Now we realize what I've said is axiomatic. We take it for granted.

This is the case, and it is. We fail to realize that God is equally sensible. That is, in his church he has standards for membership and he has a reason for being.

And part of the deterioration of the influence of the church in the last 400 years, since the time of the Reformation, lies in confusion in purpose. This is fundamental. It's foundational.

There's two points of view, becoming increasingly clear as 62 moves on in the passing of the years of the decade. There are two points of view, quite distinct and quite different, and we need to understand them. The first is that the purpose of the gospel is essentially to get people saved from hell.

Primarily, God's great interest is to secure people against punishment, to rescue them from the pit, from the lake of fire, and to thus get simply, on whatever level one can, converts. If we will use the analogy of the house, it'll be that his purpose is to fill all the rooms in the mansion that he's building on the other shore. He wants none left empty.

This is one point of view. Now, it isn't long. It's a matter of emphasis, but it makes a great deal of difference in the effect.

They say that in, I haven't seen it, but in Paris, outside of the railroad yard, the tracks in the main depot, there are two tracks that run parallel for several miles, five or six miles, I've read, just gradually veering a little one from the other. One will end in the Baltic, in the frozen north. The other will end in Italy, in the sunny south.

They've gone together seemingly interminably, side by side, but because there was a difference in intention, there's a difference in destination. Now, if God's great purpose in grace is just to secure people against hell, see them saved from the possibility of punishment, he's going to adapt means appropriate to that end, and the church is going to become essentially an evangelistic society. This is going to be its primary strategy and its primary end and aim.

The other point of view is that the church is to be a habitation of God through the spirit. God's purpose in grace is to certainly save people from the penalty of their sin, but that he has intended that individuals would be nurtured and strengthened and grown up in Christ to be presented to him as adults, full-grown, mature men and women. That the church, therefore, is to be, if I can use the word and not have it misunderstood, the Bible institute for the Christian, the place of training, the place where he secures his experience, the place that he's nurtured and disciplined, shaped and formed, would have reference to that latter part of the Great Commission.

Go ye therefore and teach all nations baptizing them, this is the doorway, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you, and lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the age. The evangelization to be done in the world, not primarily in the house, not primarily in the building, though this of course is always our desire, yet we find that America is becoming increasingly hard to get the unsaved inside of a hall such as this, increasingly difficult, and it is thus that in the New Testament times, the evangelization was done by the people in the community, in the marketplace, in the home, in the village, in shop, every Christian was an evangelist. I believe there's no challenge to this.

In the 20th century, however, because of the success of certain individuals and certain emphases, it became increasingly the mode that the evangelization should be done within the walls of the building set aside for the work of the Lord. This of course meant that there had to be ever increasingly brilliant program, ever increasingly more entertaining features to draw those who were interested in things spiritual, that the level of approach was to attract the world inside the walls where they'd hear the gospel and be saved. This, I say, has accounted for the trend in this direction.

Now there are two points of view. Philosophically they're wide apart, east and west. The one is that the church itself is to be the place that believers come to be instructed, to be nourished, to be taught, to be fed, to be guided, to be helped, and then to be sent out to do the evangelizing.

They're to do it in the marketplace, they're to do it in the shop, they're to do it in the place of business, they're to do it at school, to do it on the street, that we are to find sinners where they are and carry the

gospel to them. He said go and preach, he didn't say come and hear. He said come and learn, but he said go and preach.

The preaching is to be done where the people are, in a natural environment where they're relaxed, where there's no prejudice against the forms and ceremonies, and no rejection of Christ because between the sinner and Christ has become traditions which stand in the way of the sinner seeing Christ. Now these are poles of position, poles of view, and they're quite separate. We've got to recognize that God has obviously a choice.

I'm sure that he is not in the least opposed to a building being secured permanently or temporarily for the purpose of getting the unsaved in. I'm confident that this is set forth clearly in the word and certainly in keeping with all that we read in the scripture. But if this is done, for instance, if the primary strategy of evangelism is to be inside of these walls and you're to go out and bring people here to hear the gospel, it means a particular direction of preaching and a particular arrangement of all that pertains to the activities on the platform.

Everything has to be to the end of attracting and holding and making it easier for you to bring the people. But if that is done, and perhaps some might argue that it should be done, there then will have to be some other time, some other way whereby people can get what God intended them to have, which is instruction, which is nurture, which is discipline, which is training, that they might grow up into Christ in all things. Now I do not think the two are mutually exclusive at all.

I do think that the biblical pattern is that every believer is to be an evangelist, for every believer has access to the same truth. We do not believe in an esoteric revelation to priests as against the laity. This book is in your hands, you have the right to read it, study it, it's as much yours as it is mine, or any professor in bible school.

We do not hold that there are hidden things in the word of God that can't be shared by everyone, that there's a particular class to whom God speaks. Anyone who will listen will hear him speak, he's spoken through his word, and he speaks by his spirit, quickening that word to the heart of the one who will hear. We're convinced of this beyond any question of a doubt, and so are you.

You have not only the same truth, the same message, but everyone has the same equipment, for the Holy Spirit was not reserved for a particular class, for the priestly classes against the layman. To the contrary, he said after that the Holy Ghost has come upon you, and this you is identified by Peter when he said the promise is to you, and to your fathers, your children, to them that are far off to as many as the Lord our God shall call. And if God has called you, he's called you into all the privileges that are in Christ.

To know the fullness of the Holy Spirit, to receive personal gifts and enablements from the Spirit, there's not something that he's done for one that he won't do for you. This is, this again is an axiomatic truth of the scripture. You have all the truth that anyone has, and you have all the provision that anyone has.

There is nothing further than the power of the Holy Ghost, which is your privilege. The fullness of the presence of God is as much your privilege as any missionary or any pastor. God has no grandchildren that he, to whom he bequeaths is just a token of blessing.

This is his intention for you. Thirdly, you have a greater responsibility. To say that the command go into all the world and preach the gospel means a particular class of people, a particular number, is certainly

wrong.

It can't possibly mean that. It means that all are to go, all are to share in the responsibility to carry the message. It's as much your business to evangelize New York as it is anyone in any place.

It's as much your concern as it is Wynne Ralphie's who works with the children. It's as much your concern as it is Brad Reid who works with the high school students. There is no such thing as hiring it done or passing it over onto other shoulders.

This is a personal commandment by a personal Lord to you, and you must find how the matter is to be solved. The presence of the Salvation Army cadets with us reminds us of William Booth, the lay preacher of the Methodists, who became concerned about his personal responsibility. He started first the Christian mission, I believe it was, and then fell upon that happy phrase Salvation Army.

But it was a burden to reach those that weren't being reached. He took it personally, and you must take it personally. This is unquestionably God's intent and God's purpose for you as an individual Christian.

But if this is to be accepted by you as true, that it's your responsibility to preach, your responsibility to witness, your responsibility to contact people wherever you can and communicate to them on the level of their need, then it implies that somewhere you must have been taught the scripture. Somewhere you must have been guided into a relationship with the Holy Spirit. Somewhere you must have been disciplined.

Somewhere you must have received some instruction from counsel, from help. Somewhere you must have been given the kind of nourishment that would keep your own heart vigorous and healthy. Now the New Testament tradition is perfectly clear in this, that it was the meeting of the church, they tried to meet on the first day of the week because it was the day of resurrection, when the church gathered to be nourished.

And in fact some one of the church historians wrote saying that the most important man in the first century wasn't the preacher, they didn't really know who was going to do the preaching, but it was the janitor, the doorkeeper, the one who kept out anyone who had not a good clear testimony of hope in Christ. Because it was understood that they couldn't worship an invisible Lord and they would have no means of fellowship with the living God. Therefore, if we can assume that it is, and I believe correctly, certainly it's the postulate entire ministry with you, that it is the intent of God that you should be brought to that place of biblical maturity where you can be fruitful and useful and effective for him.

Then it means that coming into the church is not simply coming into those that have been benefited by the death of Christ to the end where they won't go to hell when they die. But coming into a company of people where one is prepared to prepare himself to become all that God intended him to be. And gives himself diligently to apply what is given in instruction and teaching to his own heart that he might prosper in growth and in maturity and in development.

Thus we would say that the other pole is that the church is essentially a place where believers gather, it is a building of habitation of God wherein the Lord Jesus Christ is revealed, wonderfully revealed, in the life of each individual and through each individual to the group. And the point of it all is that it should be something for the Lord, something that's his, something that that he gets what he wants, or he gets what he needs and his people get what they need from him. That this then is the other point of view, it is that there should be a time and a place where believers can gather for the express purpose of being nurtured

and nourished.

Now I firmly believe that in addition to service such as this which is a proclamation of the basic truth, there ought to be a time of implementation. I do not know yet when it will be, how it will be, but I am convinced that one of the means of the greatest possible growth to the individual Christian is that hour of sharing, that time when he can say what God has taught him. Whereas the scripture says every man has a psalm, every man has a hymn, everyone makes a contribution, and God is controlling and ruling.

It can't be done in service such as this, in fact we've pretty well organized the liberty of the freedom of the Holy Spirit out of much of our meeting, but we still recognize its importance and its place and wait to be shown from the Lord how it is to be done. There are those that would say this service should be turned into such a meeting at 11 o'clock on Sunday. My argument is there are 168 hours in the week, this is the hour when our nation pauses to pay its respect to God and an hour when we ought to be proclaiming.

There should be some other time when we could meet for that kind of sharing. But let the principle be accepted by you and its implementation can come in due course. If you accept the fact that the church is to be a place of nurture, a place of instruction, a place of fellowship, a place of discipline, and you so enter it with this as your view and this as your goal, then you're going to expect certain ministries, you're going to be amenable to those ministries, and you're going to covet them for your own heart.

This is tremendously important, the discipline of fellowship. I've spoken, I'm using this to refer to what I believe the Spirit of God wants the church to be. A place where your own who stood on the same level you stood for everyone in the church came as sinners.

Self-confessed and self-condemned sinners. This is the only kind of people that are the heirs of grace. If I speak to someone outside of Christ and you happen into the service and you say I'm not good enough to be a Christian, may I remind you today that the only ones who can actually claim to be Christians are those who have disavowed all personal goodness and said that in me and in myself there is no means of pleasing God.

I stand utterly bankrupt before him and the only thing I can do is plead for mercy. You couldn't be with worse people in and of themselves than in a church of bible-believing Christians, because they've all stood as utterly helpless, totally hopeless, and self-condemned. And when they get inside forgiven by the grace of God and pardoned by his blood, let them not forget the pit from which they've been digged.

Let them know come no sense of pride in anything that they were. There's only one thing that you were before God and his grace found you and that was a hopeless, a helpless, a hell-deserving sinner. So was I. We stood there pleading nothing but more for mercy, offering nothing but need.

And God met us. Now this is the grounds of our coming. But God's purpose isn't to leave us there.

Babies are born but they're not to stay in the cradle. They're to grow, they're to be nurtured, they're to be disciplined. And so it is that when it's established that you've been born of God, God wants you in a church.

I believe that. I firmly believe that there is a real reason why a baby in Christ or an older Christian coming into a community ought to apply to the eldership of any given church. For instance, if you, and we trust you will be if you are, become interested in becoming a member of this church, in order to facilitate it and to stimulate your mind, we give you a questionnaire.

Now I think this is right and proper. I don't find it in the scripture, but I am sure that they didn't have mimeographs there either to facilitate it. But the question could have been asked verbally just as well as to have been projected in this way.

But there's a reason. You are to be stimulated. You are to be stirred.

You are to face your motives and your interests and your purpose. This is important. And when this is done, you are to be willing to come before elders.

Not to prove that you're wrong, but simply as a recognition that the church has a head. Now the head is not the elder. Indeed, that's not the case.

Nor the pastor. This is not the case. The head is Christ.

But he has ordained that there should be eldership. He has ordained that there should be those to whom the individuals are responsible and who in turn are responsible to him. And I believe that in so coming, it isn't to become part of a denomination.

For instance, I've had some say, well they didn't want to become part of any denomination. Not that they had anything against the alliance, but they just didn't want to become a part of any denomination. The moment that you don't become a part of something, then you're a part of all the others who aren't part of something in this in itself.

Denominates you. The word denomination means simply the name by which it is called. This is all.

And the moment that one, we can't help it, we can't avoid living by some name. Denominate simply means to give it a name. And this of course is the, is true that it happens.

Now when a person becomes a member of any local church, if that church is utterly independent of all other fellowships, still there is a sense in which it has become denominated to those that are independent of all other fellowships. And it is true. I believe therefore that the purpose for such submission in the 20th century, today, now, is not to become part of the gospel tabernacle church.

This isn't it. Nor to become part of the Christian missionary alliance. This isn't it.

Or wherever else God may be leading you. But it is a matter of submission to discipline. Submission to fellowship.

Submission to our, the fact that we are one in Christ. Years ago, 10 years now, actually 1963, God led me to convictions in the word of God which I had not previously held. Convictions which were shared by many of the great writers of the time, for I was greatly profited by Andrew Murray and F.P. Meyer and George Mueller and so many others.

But at the time they were not shared by the fellowship in which I was a part. I had to go to my leaders. I had to say this is what I've come to believe.

These are the convictions that I hold. This is what do you say of them. And the answer was no, we don't share them.

So there was no alternative but to take my demand. Because I couldn't in good conscience stay where my convictions were not with that which I had avowed when I came in. And so I did not know where to go.

I had no idea. I knew what I believed and what I didn't believe. But I did not know where to go.

While in Chicago, the Spirit of God spoke to my heart as clearly and as definitely as normal audible, but it wasn't. And I was in prayer asking the Lord where, where, where now Lord? What's next for me? And just as clearly as though he'd spoken, he said, go see Dr. Tozer. Now I'd never read a word to my knowledge Dr. Tozer had written.

This was 1953. I had never met him. I'd never heard him speak.

But one friend of mine who was for a time a missionary in Africa had said one day, you preach something like Dr. Tozer. And I said, who's he? He mentioned it. And that was the first and last time to which my ears had heard the name Tozer.

But at this time, because I knew that he was in Chicago, been told that, I asked, was waiting on the Lord and go here. I had to look it up, find out the name of the church, ask the pastor, called and went to see him. And for two hours told him exactly what I'd come to believe.

Now I said, my friends are, are, are too much, too sympathetic and my enemies too unsympathetic. I can't trust either of them. And you don't know me and have no reason to be either unsympathetic or sympathetic, but you'll be completely honest.

This is what I've come to believe. This is how I've come to believe it. This is what I stand on.

After two hours, he said, that's exactly the, what I believe. That's exactly what the alliance believes is. I believe that God has sent you to it.

Well, I said, how do you get into the alliance? He said, well, someone asked Paul Rader that and Dr. Rader said, you get kicked in. He said, well, uh, how do you get out of the alliance? Dr. Rader said, you peter out. Well, this, this was my introduction to it.

And so within the months I had met Dr. Pastor Battles in Orlando, Florida, had bought a little home in Orlando, was a member of the alliance church in Orlando. And I was step-by-step with the Lord. And Pastor Battles said, would you be interested in credentials from our district? I said, no, I haven't thought about it.

Let me pray about it. As I prayed, the Lord impressed my heart and he invited me to go with him. And so I met with the district committee on credential.

And they, and I'll never forget Mr. Mangum, the superintendent saying, Brother Reedhead, why are you asking for credentials in the alliance? Do you want a church in our society? I said, no, as I know my heart, I don't. Well, he said, do you want meetings in our churches? I said, as I know my heart, I don't. Well, what do you wish then? Why are you asking for credentials? And I said, Brother Mangum, I am asking for credentials in this society because I want the discipline of fellowship.

I don't trust me. I feel that I'm too, might be too easily swayed, too easily led. I want to be among my brethren who share the same basic convictions and truths that I share, to whom I become responsible.

Because I want to be corrected when I need correction and disciplined when I need discipline and encouraged when I need encouragement. I need the discipline of fellowship. Now, beloved, I believe that this is, that was the first time I'd ever heard it, nor have I seen the combination of words since, but it is my conviction that this is an essential principle of the word of God, that this is the discipline of fellowship.

We need each other. We need each other. We need to be corrected by each other.

We need to be helped by one another. We need to submit what we have to one another. Here we have, in this case, Paul and Barnabas had gone and preached.

Perhaps they had become, in their concept of grace, just a little bit too of it. But anyway, Judaizing brethren came in and affected the Pharisees and they said, you must be circumcised. There was conflict.

I'm confident that between you and their friends there will be conflict. I'm confident between you and me there will be. There are, because we're individuals, we're using words and words are arbitrary symbols of meaning.

I may mean one thing, you take it to mean another. Just as many a college student in a bull session to three in the morning, finally in exhaustion, said, well what do you mean? And then the other one tells, well that's what I mean. What have we been fighting for for five hours? But they've bothered, they'd rather fight, you see, and they finally got the venom out of their system so they can communicate with one another.

And this is probably going to happen often in your life because you're using words which are arbitrary symbols of meaning. They mean one thing to you and something else to the one who We need the discipline of fellowship. We need each other.

We need someone that will in love look at us and say you're wrong. Paul and Barnabas said we've got to go to the brethren, impartial and honest and honorable, and present to them the Judaizing, the protecting the Pharisees and their representatives. They came in and presented.

They were all received as brethren. They were loved. There was no schism.

This wasn't schism. This wasn't division. This was an honest attempt to find out where they stood and find the principles on which they stood.

And so they said this is what we hold. This is what we've got, said Paul and Barnabas. The other said no, this is what we feel.

And so they submitted it to the brethren. They submitted it to the apostles and the eldership. And the answer that came was a clear answer.

And it was one in which there was set forth a basic principle of all church life. We need one another. We because the goal is to be like Christ.

The goal is to be nurtured. The goal is to be corrected. Children sometimes may feel they don't need parents.

Don't do this and don't do that. Maybe too frequently on the parents list. I've tried to figure out some other way to say it, but always when I've worked out my nice little monologue, it comes up, don't do that, because I haven't time for the rest of it.

And I want to take care of the thing on the spot. But maybe we as parents are just a little too free with the don'ts. But I assure you that children need parents.

They need that discipline. They need that fellowship. They need to be corrected.

They need to be helped. They need each other. Now I do not believe that it falls to one to do it.

I believe that there's eldership. And I believe that over eldership, there's always other eldership. And when the eldership is finally found its last place, it submits to the Lord and to the entire company of the people.

And so we find that God has established a principle here. Oh it's wonderful to have the truth, but oh how many times people without having that fellowship and without realizing that they were there have gone off in some tangent to the scripture and have produced some deviation that's then become a snare to many. We find also that many times fellowship can be abused, that there can be a coercive power, a force that destroys thought and stultifies initiative and spiritual inquiry.

And this too must be avoided. In this case, elders must be disciplined as well. But dear heart, for you as a Christian to submit, submit yourselves one to another, there is to be at first a submission to the word.

If you do not submit to the word, there'll be none of it. There has to be a rule, the word is the rule. There has to come a rule to your life, not your experience.

I remember talking some years ago with a man who said, well I don't want to deny my experience. And I said, neither do I, but I don't want to build a doctrine on my experience. The doctrine teaching comes from the word.

The word is the rule. And of course, Christ is the Lord. We submit to his sovereignty through his word and by his spirit.

We submit to the word because the word first tells us that he is Lord of every area of your life, of every department of your life. And so the doorway is a low door, it's like a wicked gate. The only way to come in, Lord Jesus Christ.

And thus we just submit to the word and we submit to the Lord. We submit to the personal discipline of the spirit of God. If you learn to recognize the rule of the Holy Spirit, there's a certain, I remember going out of my way some years ago, oh three, four hundred miles, to spend an hour with Dr. Brown.

I had perplexity and confusion as to what my course should be. And it was worth every penny of the extra airline ticket to hear him say this, brother, have you learned to let the peace of God rule in your heart? If you don't have peace about it, you can't. Peace of God has to rule.

I have to recognize the rule of the Holy Spirit, the rule of the word, the rule of the Lord Jesus Christ, the rule of the spirit. And then of course, there has to be also a submission one to another. When you find the doctrine and convictions as such, that they're incompatible with where you are, then you must go where you are.

But you will always find that others have gone that way. And you will find a fellowship there. You will find that we're, if it's within the scope of the word of God.

The scripture says there must of necessity be a choice, or be choosing. Not everybody is going to like any, anything and may not meet the need of others. But the point of it must be that somewhere along the line, you come to the place that you say, this is where God has put me.

This is the discipline that I receive. This is the responsibility that I accept and I have prepared for. Now I believe that if we accept the discipline of fellowship, we're going to find ourselves nurtured and matured and strengthened.

We don't ever want to come to that state of anarchy that where God condemned the generation because every man did as seemed right in his own eyes. We're part of a fellowship. Paul and Barnabas, as strongly convicted as they were, were willing to submit what they had to the apostleship.

And I believe that it is highly, highly responsible on your part to say, here's where the Lord has put me. If he has, this is the fellowship where I find myself. And here is this, this is what I covet, the discipline of fellowship.

When God has put you there, accept it. I say in closing, how greatly I was blessed through the writings of Commissioner Brangle as a student at Taylor University. I read about this young man from an Indiana university that had won the national oratorical contest.

And then with all his brilliant future felt that God was calling him into the then little known Salvation Army. He had to go to England for army training. Here he was, a university graduate, and a brilliant one with great prospects in his profession, and God calling him to the Salvation Army.

He wrote to the general and was accepted and went and arrived and went into the wherever barracks they had. And someone one day, before it wasn't as well organized as it is now, and said, General Booth, what are you going to do with this young American, Brangle? Oh, say, the chap who was taking care of the soldier's booth isn't here anymore. I wonder if, put Brangle down there in the basement polishing the boot.

And so this young university student went down in the dark corner of the basement and spent the next several weeks doing nothing but scraping the mud off the worn boots of the soldiers and polishing them. But he learned something in this that stood him in great stead and gave him an authority that was recognized the world around. He learned there's nothing low or mean or little when it's done with an eye single to the glory of Jesus Christ, and it's done in the fellowship of the church.

May God grant to us that willingness of heart to commit ourselves to him and to him. May he teach us the discipline. Shall we bow our hearts together in prayer.

Our Heavenly Father, we live in a day when the church is almost in anarchy where every man doesn't see right in his own eye. The militant forces of atheism and materialism march in cadence to the beat of their intent to destroy all that we hold precious in the earth. And we, Lord, so often march to our own whim and our own fancy.

We march so loosely through many different directions, no sign of order and no sign of purpose. Give to us here in this corner in 44th Street and 8th Avenue a great sense of responsibility and a great sense of privilege and grant to us a wholehearted embrace of the discipline of fellowship. Give to all the officers that have been newly elected this past Wednesday a sense of the high calling in Christ Jesus.

Give to all that have accepted any responsibility of dedication not to the past but to the Lord. Not to the work but to the one who reigns. And grant our Father that we shall find in our fellowship this year such a delight in submission to him who loved us, who died that we might live and who lives to reign and rule in our lives.

To his word, to the rule of the Holy Ghost in our hearts and to the fellowship of the body, give to us, Lord, such delight that this shall be a year marked by the greatest profit we've ever known in our Christian pilgrims. So to that end, seal we pray our meditation this morning and might there come to each of our hearts a recommitment and a re-consecration to the word, to the Lord, to the rule of the Holy Ghost, and to the fellowship of the body of Christ. In his name and for his sake we ask this.

Amen. Shall we stand for the benediction? Speak to others before you leave. They may be as strange and new here as you are.

Now may the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God the Father, his fellowship in the communion of the Holy Ghost be unified with us now and until Jesus comes again. Amen.

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