

CRISES IN FELLOWSHIP

For the past five generations, the churches of Christ have experienced one crisis in fellowship after another. It became very apparent by the 1970s that many in the church no longer cared about the Truth in respect to the plan of salvation, the identity of the church, and Scriptural worship. They determined that we really cannot judge whether a person who was baptized “because of” the remission of sins was Scripturally baptized or not. Finally, these apostates came down on the side of the devil by asserting that baptism follows rather than precedes salvation. This, of course, caused appropriate breaches in fellowship across the brotherhood.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s (and continuing to this day) a not insignificant number of brethren saw unscriptural divorces and remarriages arise within their own families. In the cases of many, abandonment (or shall we say, reassessment and false interpretation) of Matthew 19:9 resulted in a collective sigh of relief on the part of these truth changers. Neither they nor the congregations in which they were members had to withdraw fellowship from members in adulterous unions. There was no such thing! Virtually anyone could divorce and remarry, and at worst, they admitted that God would sort it all out in the Day of Judgment. At best, adultery was just unfaithfulness to one’s marriage vows [rather than a sexual act, DM]. One could repent of that unfaithfulness and remarry! A man could go through that process as many times as he wished, and it made no difference if current spouse number five had been married a half dozen times without the first marriage’s (or any subsequent marriage, for that matter) ending as a result of unfaithfulness on her husband’s part. While the liberals rejoiced in their new found “truth,” once again hundreds of congregations were ripped asunder.

It doesn’t take a lot of deep thought to realize that these, and scores of other examples to which we could refer, demonstrate that, within the churches of Christ, there is a crisis of fellowship. In the two matters above, as in almost every case of apostasy from the Truth, self-declared “intellectuals” have led the way. Do you know what an intellectual is? He is a man who spends the first half of his life searching for truth, and once he finds it, spends the second half explaining why the truth he discovered is not so. Pseudo-intellectualism has played its role in the aforementioned crises of fellowship, and it continues to do so in every new fellowship issue that arises.

Brethren who believe they are so much more intelligent than the rest of us are using their “intellectualism” as justification for change. The current crisis that destroyed the fellowship that once existed among present and past faithful brethren may, by its scope, turn out to be the most devastating one to date. There is now such a small pocket of brethren who understand both the present issues involving fellowship and the seriousness of them that it would not surprise us if the number of faithful brethren left number only in the hundreds, or at best, a handful of thousands.

As was the case with the divorce and remarriage issue, the present abandonment by some regarding God’s laws governing fellowship is splitting families and even households, as well as congregations. Yet those who understand what is happening among us realize that the principle set out by the apostle John in 2 John 9–11 (i.e., that one may not fellowship a false teacher nor those who fellowship false teachers), is a core issue, and one that is not minutiae, as many would have us believe. No, it goes to the very foundation of New Testament teaching. Thus faithful brethren did not create the crisis. Rather, they are standing in a dark hour, hoping to reverse the devastating consequences which have arisen since some of those who spent so long searching for, coming to the knowledge of, and formerly teaching the truth on fellowship, have now decided that very truth just isn’t so.

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