

Band of Brothers!

The final installment in my subject of the ground and restriction of fellowship has to do with not only those with whom I would restrict my fellowship, but more importantly, those who restrict it for me.

I will not let others control my fellowship or curtail my freedom in Christ.

I am about to write something here that I hope clarifies some issues when I preach for people that do not share the fine details of Christchurch Baptist Fellowship's convictions. In some of the venues where I preach, I come to edify and to lift. Other places I come with desire in my heart for revival. I don't say to an unbeliever, if you first will agree with me on our statement of faith, constitution and by-laws, and dress code, then I will honor you with my presence and show you in the Bible how to be saved. No, my prayer is that they will convert. Jesus told us to be fishers of men. Don't worry, He'll clean the fish, if we just get them to Him. If a man should say, "If you leave your Bible outside the door, ignore your statement of faith, and promise not to say anything about morality, you may come in," then I'll not be making myself at home. Please hear me out before you judge me on what I am about to say. I preach in some places where I don't take our church members with me. Some that I preach for are highly influenced by the world, and in some cases biblical standards have been compromised in the name of expediency and trends of the day. I come to be a blessing and hopefully see some turn back to the Lord and old time religion. Years ago, I preached for one man who led the state of Arkansas in baptisms for a convention of which I am not a part. There is a dear man of God who broke records for the same convention in the state of Georgia. I also preached for this man on other occasions. Both of these men are now some of our finest fundamentalist, independent Baptist preachers in America. Although I was not the only independent that did so, I submit to you that in loving them and being with them in conference and preaching helped bring them closer to our belief than further from our dearly believed doctrines. Hear me out before you stop reading! If I am told I can come and preach but I must not mention how I feel about divine preservation of the Bible in the King James Version, my personal belief about modesty, or my interpretation of grace, then I am not going to be preaching in that conference. Occasionally this will happen, thank God, not often.

The plain and simple truth is, many times I am restricted from fellowship not because I chose to be restricted but because the fear of man has brothers in Christ so bent on pleasing one another in close knit fellowships, that if we do not fit the prescribed mold we are ostracized. Secondary separation has gone to removal to the third, fourth, etc, ad infinitum, ad nauseum. If we run with people who run with people, who run with people who don't see it my way, then there is no way we fellowship. This is not new! Listen to John: *"I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church"* (II John 9, 10). Even the great Apostle John was forbid (can you believe it?) to preach by Diotrephes! Paul stood against even respected men who tried to lord over him, even to the point of correcting Simon Peter himself: *"But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me: God accepteth no man's person:) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me"* (Galatians 2:6). Peter tells us as pastors not to be *"...lords over God's heritage"*, but instead *"...being ensamples to the flock."* (I Peter 5:3).

In closing, I must testify, that I am free in the matters of fellowship. I will fear God, but not man. Just before Leonard Ravenhill died he told me one of the things A.W. Tozer told him before he died, "Lynn, I have managed to preach myself off every major Bible Conference in America." In the last twenty years of the life of the famed prayer-warrior E.M. Bounds, he was rarely invited to preach; his own association shunned him. But it was not a lost cause. It was at this time he wrote his greatest books on prayer. There is an eloquent portion in the speech by Henry V by William Shakespeare just before the Battle of Agincourt that won the day for the British against insurmountable odds. My children and I will

often quote these words to one another to encourage each other to stand alone if need be, stand with your brothers always, and always be on the side of right when you do:

He which hath no stomach to this fight,
Let him depart; his passport shall be made,
And crowns for convoy put into his purse;
We would not die in that man's company
That fears his fellowship to die with us.
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers;
For he to-day that sheds his blood with me
Shall be my brother; be he ne'er so vile,
This day shall gentle his condition;
And gentlemen in England now-a-bed
Shall think themselves accurs'd they were not here,
And hold their manhoods cheap whiles any speaks
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day.

So, my dear brothers in Christ, let us separate ourselves from sin and bind ourselves under Christ's blood-stained banner to each other for His righteous cause, "We few, we happy few, we band of brothers."

"Now I beseech you, grethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

"Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the end of that man is peace" (Psalm 37:37).

"Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ" (Philippians 3:16-18).

- Pastor Pope -

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