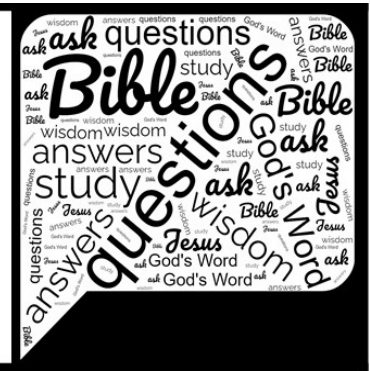


Questions & Answers From the Bible

Can We Fellowship With Brothers and Sisters Who Hold a Different Viewpoint?



Many have the misconception we must have *unity* to have *fellowship*! Biblically, we must have *fellowship* before we can have *unity*. The Apostle John was divinely inspired to pen three Epistles to steady the ship of faith in the time of apostasy. He began by setting forth the terms of fellowship. First John 1:1 refers to Christ as "the Word of life." Verse 2 speaks of "the life" and "that eternal life"; in verse 3 John penned, "That ye also may have fellowship with us . . ." The English word "fellowship" in the Greek is *koinonia*, which means "share in common." Contextually, what we "share in common" is this "life" spoken of in the previous verses. We are in "fellowship" with all who "share in common" this "life" with "the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ" (verse 3).

Our continued "fellowship" and "fellowship one with another" (verse 7) is based on our ability to continue to "share in common" this "life" and is contingent upon our continuing to "walk in the light" (verse 7). "Walk" indicates progression and advancement. Psalm 119:105 says, "Thy word is a . . . light." To maintain spiritual "life," we must do as Jesus said, "If ye continue in my word, then are ye my disciples indeed" (John 8:31).

The "life" we receive comes through the agency of the Spirit of God (Romans 8:10; 2 Corinthians 3:6). When we are "born again" (John 3:3), or "born of the Spirit" (John 3:6), "the spirit giveth life." When this occurs, we have "unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3) with every other individual who has "the Spirit" and this "life." We have a reality that we "share in common" with every other saved individual. Man cannot produce this unity! It is divinely produced by "the Spirit." The role we are charged with is to be "endeavoring to KEEP the unity of the Spirit" (Ephesians 4:3).

There is a great assault against this unity. The enemy of our souls works to cause people to have a change in their spirit. "Unity" is impossible with anyone who does not possess "THE Spirit." Unfortunately, one of the enemy's ruses is to have people who have a seemingly correct doctrinal stance but not a right spirit try to force a supposed "unity." That is conformity, or uniformity, not "unity." First Corinthians 1:10 admonishes to "all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you." The prior verse says, "Ye were called unto the fellowship [share in common] of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord." This fellowship is based on our continuing to

"walk in the light." By allowing "the Spirit of truth" (John 16:13) to enable "the eyes of your understanding [to be] enlightened" (Ephesians 1:18) concerning "the word of truth" (2 Timothy 2:15), we will see a progression to where God's people will "come in the unity of the faith" (Ephesians 4:13).

God certainly desires that "all men . . . come unto the knowledge of the truth" (1 Timothy 2:4), but it is a "knowledge" to which people must "come." When Aquila and Priscilla heard Apollos speak and knew that there was greater light than what he currently had, they "expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly" (Acts 18:26). Yes, the Lord desires we all understand "the way of God more perfectly" and "come in the unity of the faith," but we must realize that the highway of holiness has a ditch on each side. The devil does not care which ditch he gets us in as long as he can wreck us and get us off of the highway.

One ditch is division, dividing from everyone who does not see exactly as we do. When the disciples rebuked a man "because he followeth not us" (Mark 9:38), Jesus said, "Forbid him not" (Mark 9:39). The spirit that gave rise to and promoted sectism was a spirit of division that compromised the Biblical truth concerning "fellowship." Another ditch is an ecumenical spirit that accepts anything and anyone. This spirit animates the eighth beast (Revelation 17:11). Divisiveness and ecumenicalism are ploys of the devil. The Bible teaches separation (2 Corinthians 6:17) but not division (Romans 16:17), unity but not ecumenicalism, and indeed true divine fellowship.

We are admonished in Galatians 5:16 and 25 to "walk in the Spirit." When we "walk in the light" (progressing in understanding and obedience to the Word of God), "the Spirit" will unify us with all others who "walk in the light." We certainly, as the songwriter penned, "*Stand from sin Babel aloof*." Babylon is a spiritual condition produced by a devilish spirit. Wherever that condition (or spirit) pervades, unity is not possible in that setting. We must ever "preach the word" (2 Timothy 4:2), so "the Spirit" has that to use to bring people understanding, for Jesus said in John 3:21, "He that doeth truth cometh to the light." While we work with souls, we must not allow the enemy to move us to either of the ditches.

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