

FALSE OR FAITHFUL FELLOWSHIP

Jude 11-13

(NASB) "Woe to them! For they have gone the way of Cain, and for pay they have rushed headlong into the error of Balaam, and perished in the rebellion of Korah.¹² These are the men who are hidden reefs in your love feasts when they feast with you without fear, caring for themselves; clouds without water, carried along by winds; autumn trees without fruit, doubly dead, uprooted;¹³ wild waves of the sea, casting up their own shame like foam; wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever."

INTRODCTION

Over 100 million people worldwide belong to churches with Baptist affiliation; a third of whom live in the United States. Baptists can be officially identified for holding to particular beliefs: most obvious is that baptism is a step of obedience *after* people commit themselves to follow **Jesus** as Savior and Lord; it is not a step of obedience for parents concerning their children. Baptists also believe we can be saved from the penalty and power of sin only by faith in what **Jesus** has done for us, not by faith in what we or our church can do for us. We also insist the Bible is our sole guide for what we believe and practice as Christians, instead of believing that what church officials might proclaim has as much authority as the Bible.

But there are a number of informal and unofficial ways to distinguish Baptists from other people. Here are a few of them. You know you're a Baptist when: (1) You think "Amazing Grace" is the national anthem; (2) You laugh at jokes about "wherever you find two Baptists, you'll find three opinions about how something should be done"; (3) You believe the Marriage Supper of the Lamb will be a potluck, which is why you leave instructions in your will to be buried with a covered dish; and (4) When everything you know about illnesses & surgeries you learned in Wednesday prayer meetings.

Jude was a half-brother of **Jesus** and an early Christian missionary. Believers in Jude's day faced a much more difficult challenge than determining whether or not people were genuine Baptists. Jude wrote this letter to help churches recognize when actions of professed Christians make suspect their claim to have a personal, saving relationship with **Jesus Christ**. At the beginning of our study of **Jude**, we learned Satan will increasingly attack the Church from within during the "last days" before Christ's Second Coming. Churches are always more vulnerable to being sabotaged from within—by people who profess great loyalty to the Lord, say all the right things about what it means to them to be a Christian, and often participate in the meetings and activities of the church and gain positions of leadership and trust within a church body—than churches can ever be harmed by those who are openly hostile to Christianity.

We may claim we genuinely love **Jesus**, yet how we put our love for Christ into practice may be far different than the love we profess. The acid test for many Christians is not how well we relate to the Lord on our own, but how well we relate to the Lord's people, "the church of God," which **Acts 20:28** reminds us are the people **Jesus** "purchased with His own blood." A beloved Christian brother displayed these four lines on the wall of his home to remind him of the need to look upon fellow believers through the eyes of **Jesus**: "To dwell above with saints we love—Ah yes! That will be glory. To live below with saints we know, Well, that's another story." The Apostle John, near the end of a long life spent with "the saints we know," still insisted in **I John 4:20-21**, "[T]he person who does not love his brother he has seen cannot love the God he has not seen."²¹ And we have this command from Him: The one who loves God must also love his brother." **Hebrews 10:24-25** takes John's words even further by pinpointing our responsibilities toward our "blood" relatives, our fellow believers "purchased with [**Jesus**'] own blood: "And let us be concerned about one another in order to promote love and good works,²⁵ not staying away from our worship meetings, as some habitually do, but encouraging each other, and all the more as you see the day drawing near" of His dramatic Return. Today, let us ask ourselves if our commitments to Christ's people, His Church, prove or disprove our love for Christ.

I. FALSE FELLOWSHIP

Acts 2:42, 47b reveals how the first Christians put their faith in **Jesus** into practice in the early days of the New Testament Church: "And they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread, and to the prayers. And every day the Lord added to them those who were being saved." In English, "fellowship" often means little more than a "friendly relationship" or "companionship." Christians often describe any activity involving food as "fellowship." In **Acts 2:42**, "the breaking of bread" undoubtedly referred to sharing meals and observing the Lord's Supper together, so food has always been a key part of the devotion Christians demonstrate to each other. This often serves many practical needs, as well as spiritual. A church that loved good fellowship always served coffee after the sermon to encourage people to linger and visit. But the pastor overheard a youth give this explanation about why they served coffee at this time. "I think," said the boy, "it is to get the people wide awake before they drive home."

"Koinonia," the Greek word for "fellowship," is from a noun meaning "a having in common" or "a partnership." "Koinonia" describes a relation between individuals involving a common interest and a mutual, active participation in that interest and in each other. The New Testament idea of "fellowship" clearly involves far more than food and social activities. True Christian fellowship includes a sense of community, of participation, and of intimacy that is unique to the members of Christ's Church. During the Cold War when it could be dangerous to be identified as a Christian in the officially atheist Soviet Union, two men shared a train compartment; one a Polish Catholic; the other a Russian Pentecostal. They spoke different languages. In many ways, they had little in common. But somehow during their few hours together on the train, they came to realize they shared a deep love for **Jesus Christ**. Before they parted, they hugged each other with tears of joy! Our horizontal bond with fellow believers is built upon our vertical bond with our Lord (**Romans 12:5, 10**). As we experience greater warmth and depth in our fellowship with our Savior **Jesus**, our experience grows of the committed fellowship possible only with others **Jesus** has truly saved.

Jude 11-13 describes a much different mindset among some professed Christians; those with more of a "what's in it for me?" attitude than "what's in it for Jesus?" We recently looked at the selfish, ungodly motivations of Cain, Balaam, and Korah. Today let's focus upon Korah's example of false fellowship in Israel's "congregation in the wilderness," as **Acts 7:38** describes the whole body of Israelites God "saved" out of Egypt (**Jude 5**). God chose Moses to hold the position of what we might today call the main teaching elder of a megachurch. God chose Aaron to be Israel's High Priest and all of Aaron's direct descendants were to serve Israel as priests, guiding them in the LORD'S worship. God assigned leadership roles to Levi's other descendants (Levites), including Korah, as assistants to the priests; a position of great respect and honor. But this was not enough for Korah. He stirred up a jealous rebellion among 250 other Levites. They confronted Moses and Aaron, as **Numbers 16:3** (NKJV) records: "They gathered together against Moses and Aaron, and said to them, '*You take* too much upon yourselves, for all the congregation *is* holy, every one of them, and the LORD *is* among them. Why then do you exalt yourselves above the assembly of the LORD?'" **Numbers 16:4-35** reveals what happened next. Moses humbly reminded these grumblers he and Aaron claimed no special standing among the Israelites. They merely sought to fulfill the *responsibilities* God had assigned to them, as Korah and the Levites should have been content to serve God as He'd assigned *them* to do. The LORD then provided a rather gruesome object lesson to prove Korah's crowd was rebelling against God's authority, not against Moses and Aaron. The LORD swallowed the rebel leaders in an earthquake and consumed their followers by fire! God's judgment upon Korah and his followers warns us today of the devastating consequences of promoting our selfish interests above the LORD'S interests in a church community.

As I entered into marriage at age 50, **Ephesians 5:22-23a** troubled me: "Wives, submit to your own husbands as to the Lord,²³ for the husband is the head of the wife as Christ is the head of the church." The GNT of **vs. 23a** is "For a husband has authority over his wife just as Christ has authority over the church." Why did this bother me? Because I knew if God assigned me the leadership role as "head" of our family, who was the first person God would come looking for if there was a problem in our marriage? Not Loretta,

but me. I told Loretta this made me want to be born a woman so that my main responsibility would be to follow her leadership and let her be the main one to answer to God for the quality of our marriage. But I realized whether or not I *exercised* the authority God assigned me as the head of our home, or whether Loretta *recognized* God had assigned me such leadership responsibility, God would still hold me *accountable* for this responsibility. The same holds true of the officers of this church, or of any church. **I Thessalonians 5:12-13** (NASB): "But we request of you, brethren, that you appreciate those who diligently labor among you, and have charge over you in the Lord and give you instruction, and that you esteem them very highly in love because of their work. Live in peace with one another."

Anyone who assumes authority in a home or church that is not assigned by God is a *fool*; increased authority requires increased responsibility. But anyone who declines or is denied authority God assigns is a *failure*, because God holds us accountable for this responsibility whether or not we want it. Moses told Korah and these rebel Levites he didn't want this authority, but it came with the territory God assigned him. To discourage such false, disruptive fellowship within a church, **Hebrews 13:17** tells us (NIV): "Obey your leaders and submit to their authority. They keep watch over you as men who must give an account. Obey them so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no advantage to you."

Let's reread **Jude 12-13**. These verses teach our profession of faithfulness to Christ's family is false to the extent our *positive* impact upon our church members or the quality of our Christian fellowship is far less than it could be. We may be like "clouds without water" or "autumn trees without fruit." We could have brought life-sustaining benefits to those for whom **Jesus** died but didn't. A man awoke on Sunday morning in Munich, Germany. As he gazed from his warm bed at freshly fallen deep snow, he shuddered at the thought of walking a half-mile in the bitter cold to catch a bus to church. He would have remained home to read his Bible alone if he'd not been committed to lead worship that day. While riding the bus, he recognized two people struggling to make their path through the deep snow. Mr. Trollman, a man in his eighties, had lost his eyesight. His 78-year-old wife, lame in one foot, was his only guidance. They could not afford to ride the bus and walked three miles every Sunday to church; driven by their love for the Lord and for His people. This man who'd resented his half-mile walk to the bus confessed, "I was not able to do anything but blush, ashamed of myself." Secondly, we demonstrate our profession of faithfulness to our church is false to the extent our *negative* impact upon our church members and upon the quality of our Christian fellowship is far greater than it should be. The impact of our lives may resemble the broken debris and unpleasant residue left upon a shoreline in the wake of a storm, if our unChristlike moral conduct hinders Christian purity in others, like "hidden reefs" may cause ships to run aground or even sink.

II. FAITHFUL FELLOWSHIP

John Fawcett (1740-1817) is a stunning example of a commitment to Faithful Fellowship toward our own church. He epitomizes submission to God's will and the betterment of his church fellowship above every personal consideration. John Fawcett served 7 years as the devoted pastor of a small Baptist church in a country town in north-central England. In the summer of 1772, he wrote in his diary: "During these years our family has increased faster than our income." When a messenger arrived a few weeks later informing Fawcett the famous Carter Lane Baptist Church in London wanted to call him as their pastor, this seemed to be an unbelievable answer to his family's prayers. John Gill, the best-known Baptist preacher and Biblical scholar of his day, had led this church for 51 years until it became the largest Baptist Church in London. A call to become pastor of Carter Lane Baptist Church in what was then the largest city in the world seemed to be the greatest honor and best possible dream-come-true for this small-town pastor!

Fawcett quickly drafted a letter accepting the call, which he eagerly returned by the messenger from the Carter Lane Church. The following Sunday, this news came bittersweet to his church. They celebrated this grand opportunity, but a deep feeling of loyalty and mutual devotion between pastor and people had developed in recent years. Most of his faithful flock were extremely cast down about losing him. Many church

members helped the family to pack during the next few weeks, but with grim faces. After Fawcett's farewell sermon, wagons arrived and the family said their final, tearful farewells. Church members loaded their belongings onto the wagons, while their hearts were breaking. Pastor Fawcett and his wife sat upon their last packing case, overcome with grief. "John dear," his wife asked, "will we ever find a congregation to love us and help us in the Lord's work like this group here?" John admitted he'd been so overjoyed with the call from such a prestigious church he'd "never really prayed about it like a minister should." He'd been carried away by thoughts of moving into a better home, a bigger salary, and the advantages of living in London. They then listened to God and announced the decision to their joyous church they would stay!

In the next 45 years, Fawcett poured himself into this country church and rural community and became internationally recognized as the spiritual leader of this entire area of England. Shortly after declining the call to the London Church, he penned the most beautiful hymn of Christian fellowship ever written. Hear again the passion and devotion of its words: "Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love; The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above. [2] Before our Father's throne We pour our ardent prayers; Our fears, our hopes, our aims are one, Our comforts and our cares. [3] We share each other's woes, Our mutual burdens bear; And often for each other flows The sympathizing tear. [4] When we asunder part, It gives us inward pain; But we shall still be joined in heart, And hope to meet again."

The Faithful Fellowship that bound John Fawcett to the members of this church was based upon mutual support, sacrifice, and love; not an attitude of, "What have you done for *me*, lately?," or of, "What's in it for *me*?" which are the bases of False Fellowship. Faithful Fellowship is not built upon *manipulation* of others to get what we want, but *capitulation* of ourselves to what **Jesus** wants. "Blest be the tie that binds Our hearts in Christian love; The fellowship of kindred minds Is like to that above."