

Building Bridges to Fellowship

The religious world known as "Christian" is woefully divided. Countless denominations have popped up over the centuries, each having its own creed, manual, or series of doctrines that either add to or take away from the New Testament. Even the self-labeled "non-denominational" groups are firmly rooted in doctrines that are foreign to the Word of God. While individuals in these organizations acknowledge that there is division, they generally feel that there is little need to do anything about it since, in their words, "We're all going to heaven. We're just taking different roads."

The church of Christ is woefully divided. Through the years the Lord's body has suffered the side-piercing thrusts of the spears wielded by those who either come short of what God has authorized or go beyond and bind what God has not bound in the New Testament. We, too, must deal with the apathetic attitude that some among us have regarding these barriers to fellowship. In addition, we must also bear with those among us who, while they believe that having a standard for fellowship is important, nonetheless believe their opinions, and not the Word of God, form the standard. In short, while some among us have become as lax regarding the pure New Testament doctrine as the denominational world, others in the Lord's church have drawn their circle of fellowship so small that only they and a few others of whom they approve fit into it.

The Lord's desire for His people was, is, and always will be unity (John 17:20-23). Paul decried division when he wrote to the church in Corinth (I Corinthians 1:10). Wherever lack of Biblical unity exists, Biblical fellowship cannot exist. That's a principle that goes as far back as the prophet Amos who asked, "Can two walk together, unless they are agreed?" (Amos 3:3). Therefore, the most significant bridge that we can build to fellowship is that of unity upon God's Word. In particular, the New Testament must be our single pathway in matters of faith. Any attempt at crossing a bridge to fellowship that is not paved with the truth of God as it has been revealed in the New Testament is an attempt at earthly agreement rather than God-authorized fellowship.

With the knowledge that building the bridge to fellowship begins with the New Testament, we should actively seek to meet others on that bridge. When was the last time you spoke to someone outside of the church about the disunity that exists in the "Christian" world? Try this sometime. Ask someone who is not a member of the church of Christ, "Isn't it sad that there is so much disunity among the people who call themselves 'Christians'?" You'll get some interesting responses. While some will say, "No, it doesn't really matter," others will say, "Yes, it certainly is sad." Either response gives you an opportunity to ask, "Would you like to sit down and discuss the Bible together?" If you receive a positive response to that question, your study could begin with points of agreement such as the existence and identity of the one, true God, the inspiration of the Bible, and the Deity of Jesus. By going to the Word and finding that common ground with another person, you are building a bridge to fellowship. Of course, it's not nearly built at that point, but sharing a common respect for God and His Word on these basic matters can set the stage for a rational discussion of those areas which are typical sources of disagreement such as the fact that Jesus only built one church, the plan of salvation, scriptural worship, and scriptural organization of the church.

When was the last time that you spoke to a fellow Christian about the disunity that exists in the Lord's church? Try a variation on the question suggested in the previous paragraph. "Isn't it sad that there is so much disunity in the church of Christ?" While you might get an occasional, "no," you're more likely to get an encouraging response that will invite a lengthier discussion. This has the potential to build the bridge of fellowship that will not only benefit both yourself and the fellow Christian to whom you are speaking, but also the church as a whole. In addition, the stronger we are together in the church of Christ, the greater our influence upon the world will be.

We definitely need to communicate more. We need to talk about the broken fellowship brought about by disunity and what we can do about it. As Christians, we need to be the ones reaching out and seeking to build the bridge of fellowship. No true fellowship can exist outside of mutual obedience to God, but if we who are children of God do not strive to build the bridge by teaching and living according to God's inspired Word, who will?

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